A study into Dyslexia and the level of awareness amongst FÁS Staff at the FÁS Training Centre Finglas

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Submitted to the National College of Ireland Dublin

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management

July 2005

For my parents Carole Ann & Daniel Cullen

And my partner Paul May

Thank you for all your support!!

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Abstract

Dyslexia is a condition that affects and estimated eight per cent of the population to some extent. Half that number experience significant dyslexic difficulties. This has repercussions both for the teaching methodologies used for FÁS programmes and for a general understanding of dyslexia. Despite the growing presence of individuals with dyslexia on FÁS training programmes, many FÁS staff many of those who are in prime teaching positions, may misunderstand what it is and what it means. Without understanding and appropriate teaching, many individuals with dyslexia may feel alienated from the further training and education system.

By using the Finglas Training Centre as a sample group, this study aims to highlight areas where further input is necessary to inform and correct any misconceptions about dyslexia by providing an overview of its causes and characteristics. Also this study will make suggestions on how tutors and instructors can increase their understanding of what Dyslexia is and therefore facilitate the learning style of dyslexic individuals throughout their time on FÁS programmes.

Also the study will aim to highlight any gap in the service that FÁS provides at the recruitment stage for FÁS training interventions in the Employment Services Unit and what can be done to address any issues that may be highlighted.

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As a result of the research conducted suggestions may also be made to help

bridge the gap between training and employment for people who have a learning

difficulty.

Section 1 Literature Review

1.1 Setting the Context

1.1.1 What is a Disability?

While researching Dyslexia, I thought is important to set the context and from FÁS ' Guidelines on Supporting People with Disabilities the following is an overview of what a disability is:

'Disability is impossible to describe in one or two sentences, partly because it covers a huge range of things and also touches a large number of people. Generally a disability is the inability to perform one or more major life activities because of an impairment, e.g., missing, damaged or weakened body part or function.'

Major life activities include the following:

- Having a full range of movement while standing, lifting, walking and so forth,

- Having intact senses (vision, hearing touch, smell, taste, balance),

- Communicating with others (speaking and writing)

- Learning and working,

- Caring for oneself in hygiene and homemaking,

- Using mental processes such as thinking, concentrating and problem solving,

- Interacting with others and developing and maintaining relationships.

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'Disability is not a specific medical diagnosis such as spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, or intellectual difficulties. While this information is often important in the medical context, it is normally not what arises when you come into contact with someone with a disability. In assessing the impact of the person's disability, it is more useful to ask if as a result of the person's impairment is there a substantial, more than minor or trivial, effect on the person's ability to carry out one or major life activities.'

1.2 Dyslexia

There are many definitions of dyslexia. A very simple one would be that dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, which makes it hard for some people to learn to read, write and spell correctly. The recent report of the task force Dyslexia (2001) suggests the following more scientific definition:

> *'Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of specific learning difficulties related to Acquisition of basic skills in reading spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexplained in relation to an individual's other abilities and educational experiences. Dyslexia can be described at the neurologica, cognitive and behavioural levels. It is typically characterized by inefficient information processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, including difficulties in phonological processing, working memory, rapid naming and automaticity of basic skills. Difficulties in organization, sequencing and motor skills may also be present.'*

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Another definition from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (2000), states

'Dyslexia is a genetic condition, which causes some people to have difficulty in learning to read, write and spell correctly. It can cause problems with arithmetic, learning foreign languages and in processing information quickly. It can be hard for people with dyslexia to become organised and effective students. There is no 'quick fix' for the problem but appropriate tuition can help peole with dyslexia to reach their full potential'

The report of the task force goes on to say that the learning difficulties arising from dyslexia:

- Occur across the lifespan, and may manifest themselves in different ways in different ages;

- May co-exist with difficulties in the area of numbers;

- May be associated with early spoken language difficulties;

- May be alleviated by appropriate intervention;

- Increase or reduce in severity depending on environmental factors;

- Occur in all socio-economic groups

- Can co-exist with other learning difficulties such as Attention Deficit Disorder, and may or may not represent a primary difficulty.

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1.3 Causes of Dyslexia

A great deal of research has been done in recent years on the cause of dyslexia and it may be that a great deal more needs to be done before we have a definitive answer. We do know that developmental dyslexia is inherited, more common in males than females and that one is born with it. While no conclusive research had been carried out in Ireland to determine how prevalent it is, studies in other countries would suggest that 6% to 8% of the population are likely to be affected. It would seem that people with dyslexia share a cluster of genes, which may, it is believed, account for the variations in the nature and extent of specific learning difficulties.

Experts are not agreed, however, on the underlying causes of dyslexia. Professor John Stein, Oxford, believes that auditory and visual difficulties are caused by abnormal magnocellular development. Malfunction in the development of sensory nerves happens at the foetal stage and is said to cause eye convergence difficulties and inhibit steady eye fixation. Other theorists consider that a phonological deficit is the root cause to dyslexia. Evidence from brain imaging suggests that people with dyslexia do not activate the left hemisphere (the language side) in the brain as much as when reading as non-dyslexic readers, and that there is less engagement of the areas of the brain, which match letters with, sounds. Yet another view is that the role of the part of the brain which controls balance (the cerebellum) is crucial and that difference in

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this area make it difficult for children to acquire automaticity tasks and may further inhibit the development of language dexterity and motor skills.

Experts do agree that dyslexia describes differences in the way in which the brain processes information and while there may be differences in the way in which the brain works, this does not imply any abnormality, disease or deference.

1.4 Dyslexia and FÁS Programmes

Although individual cases vary, most people with dyslexia experience learning difficulties to some extent in at least one of the following areas:

- Memory
- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Handwriting
- Organisation
- Maths
- Speech

1.4.1 Memory

Almost all of the main characteristics of dyslexia are associated with poor short-term memory, which leads to difficulty in the following...

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- Recalling times tables, equations and simpler number facts in mathematics

- Remembering spelling patterns and

- Word sounds

- Keeping place in calculations

- Comprehending lengthy

Learners with dyslexia place additional pressure on their short-term memory to recall facts when reading textbooks, during class, when studying and in exam situations. They may lose their place more easily than others while reading and may require extra time to absorb the meaning from a given piece of text. Taking class notes can also be challenging because of the need to keep listening, pick out the most important facts, abbreviate them so as to understand them later and remember how to spell key terms. If an individual's short-term memory is affected by dyslexia, this task, which other learners my take for granted, can approve difficult.

1.4.2 Reading

People with dyslexia may encounter problems…

- Reading aloud

- Skimming for gist

- Reading with accuracy

- Engaging on a meaningful level with written material

- Comprehending text

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- Remaining focused

- Proof reading for errors

- Guessing the pronunciation of unfamiliar words

- Reading at a regular pace

For most learners with dyslexia, reading difficulties arise from a core problem with recognizing words quickly. As a result, these learners may misread and/or omit words frequently, a pattern that is exacerbated when they have to read aloud or read under time pressure. Naturally, this can make many learners anxious about reading or making presentation in front of their classmates. In other settings, for example when studying, learners may need to re-read text several times in order to comprehend its content fully.

1.4.3 Writing

A person whose writing skills are affected by dyslexia may experience difficulties....

- Writing at a steady speed

- Including and distinguishing between function words, such as for/or or with/which, when writing under pressure

- Using diverse vocabulary

- Avoiding capital letters in the middle of words

- Keeping ideas concise and to the point

- Employing proper grammar, due to a failure to follow sequential rules

- Using regular syntax, as a result of their avoidance of certain difficult words copying material with accuracy

In the classroom, learners with dyslexia may be unable to take sufficiently informative notes if they omit key function words or tend to write slowly. Their written assignments may also let them down if they avoid using words that are difficult to spell because the net result can be a limited vocabulary and odd sentence structure. Similarly, the quality of both written assignments and exam answers may be adversely affected if the learner omits punctuation and key prepositions or if he or she uses poor grammar.

1.4.4 Spelling

Common spelling problems among those with dyslexia include...

- Letter reversal, for example "grils" instead of "girls"
- Confusion of certain letters
- Omission or addition of syllables and letters
- Transposition of letters within words
- Bizarre, phonetically-based spelling
- Inconsistent spelling within a paragraph
- Limited recall of spelling patterns and conventions

As with writing problems, a learner's knowledge of a topic may be sold short if they have difficult in key areas. Poor spelling can affect his or her ability to take accurate notes during class and may compromise the quality of their written

assignments. For example, many apprentice-training modules refer extensively to technical terminology whose terms can have similar spellings.

A misspelled term may mean the difference between a correct and incorrect answer. Because learners with dyslexia may have difficulty recalling letter sequence, they may be unable to pick out incorrect spelling when proof-reading their finished work.

1.4.5 Handwriting

Some people with dyslexia have handwriting that is characterized by.........

- Incomplete letter formation
- An illegible or untidy style
- Inappropriate spacing of words

Training courses that demand extensive written work can pose strong challenges to the individual with dyslexia. Whereas assignments can be completed with word processing packages, exams, which generally require written responses, can be problematic. Under pressure, most people's handwriting becomes untidy, but this pattern may be more evident among those with dyslexia, who may also space words incorrectly. For example, instead of writing the word "another", an individual with dyslexia may write "a nother"

1.4.6 Maths

Many people with dyslexia have issues with numeracy, which include....

- Slow calculation rate

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- Confusion of direction of operations e.g. left to right for addition, but right to left for division

- Reversal, omission or miscopying of digits

- Difficulties in visual-spatial perception and organization

- Incoherent layout of problem solving steps

- Confusion of mathematical symbols and signs, such as + and division sign

As in the case of reading, memory difficulties can lead to problems for the learner where maths is concerned. When under pressure in exams, for example, learners may have difficulty in laying out a calculation and may make mistakes even though they understand what is being asked of them. In other cases, they may use the correct series of steps, but may inaccurately copy an answer from their calculator or reverse digits – for example, writing 52 instead of 25 – and produce a wrong answer on paper.

1.4.7 Organisation

In general, people with dyslexia find that organizing information can be problematic, translating to...

- Difficulty sequencing information when hearing, writing or reading

- Following a disordered approach to an argument

- Confusion of temporal relationships, such as clock time or dates

- Misunderstanding and difficulty recalling directions and sequences of instructions.

Individuals whose dyslexia affects their organizational skills usually encounter problems structuring assignments and arguments in a logical and persuasive manner. They may also experience difficulty performing mathematical calculations in the correct order.

Furthermore, if a dyslexic learner has difficulty remembering dates and sequences of days in the week, they may find it difficult to manage their time appropriately and meet deadlines successfully.

1.4.8 Speech

Occasionally individuals with dyslexia may experience minor speech difficulties, including...

- Malapropisms – the substitution of one word for a similar sounding word with a different meaning, for example, in the phrase "driving under the affluence" ·

- Spoonerisms – swapping the first consonant of two words, as in Gill Bates instead of Bill Gates.

- Mispronouncing words

- Using words incorrectly

- Missequencing syllables in multi-syllabic words

Speech difficulties, however minor, can make learners self-conscious when making presentations, reading aloud or when answering instructor's questions in class. As a result, these learners may appear panicky or produce wordy

responses when they feel under pressure in front of their peers. Another possibility is that dyslexic learners may encounter general word retrieval problems, known as dysnomia, in which case they use "thing", "yoke" or "stuff" instead of precise words.

While many people with dyslexia share the above characteristics, it is worth remembering that the syndrome can vary greatly in its severity between one person and another. For example, one learner may experience severe difficulty with reading quickly and comprehending the meaning in text, but another may have mild to moderate problems with writing, spelling and maths.

It is also worth remembering that many people with dyslexia can be termed "compensated dyslexics". This means that through very hard work over the years they have developed strategies to mask their dyslexia. These strategies might include customized note- taking, specific learning methods or self-advocacy. The time and effort they invest to cover up or work around any of the above issues means that many can cope generally, albeit with some difficulty, with the academic demands of their courses.

1.5 Dyslexia and the workplace

1.5.1 The nature of the difficulties

'When you are dyslexic, you grab things as you go along. You develop things in a stepladder kind of way' (Osmond, 1993). The above comment illustrates the

manner in which adults with dyslexia cope with the demands of employment and indeed life. Reid and Kirk (2001) in their literature, focus on the transition from education to employment and the difficulties a person with dyslexia will face. It appears almost as though every situation presents new challenges and therefore continual demands, which may at times exceed the person's resources. This can result in work stress (Reid and Hinton, 1999) and perhaps health related absence and unemployment.

It has been suggested (Hoffman et al., 1987) that adults with dyslexia live under constant pressure of satisfying expectations from a variety of sources, particularly relating to gaining and retaining employment. Even once they are secured in their jobs they have to ensure that they still fulfil the expectations of their employers. Rapp (1997) suggests that aspects such as organisational and leadership skills, goal setting, learning strategies and generalisation skills often need to be developed on the job, perhaps in the step-ladder like way suggested in the comment above.

1.5.2 What are the workplace difficulties?

Clearly there can be many difficulties and challenges for the dyslexic adult in employment. Essentially these can be summarized into three areas:

- Finding employment
- Maintaining employment
- Enjoying employment

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In relation to finding employment, aspects such as reading advertisements, completing application forms and performing well at interviews can present difficulties. There are many aspects within employment itself which can pose problems like time management, repetitive mistakes, speed of completing tasks, attentions span, not enough time to learn job skills and the need for extended feedback.

At the same time it is important that the particular job should be satisfying and enjoyable. We are time and again quite staggered at the number of adults with dyslexia who find themselves in employment which is inappropriate for their skills and the specific demands of the job puts them under almost daily pressure. This type of situation clearly removes much of the pleasure and self-satisfaction from work. Feelings of frustration and lack of self-confidence can prevent the person with dyslexia from enjoying employment. With more awareness of dyslexia in organisations like FÁS, this could change and help a person gain the skills needed for the type of employment that they have chosen.

1.6 Academic Skills

Many adults with dyslexia have not fulfilled their potential at school and may still have and inadequate level of literacy skills, which will impede their opportunities for employment. Literacy skills are not only referring to the ability to read and write but also include a variety of other skills. Literacy skills cannot be isolated

from the wider context of learning and poor literacy skills can have an affect on other aspects such as verbal communication, problem solving and development of general knowledge.

It is important that the person with dyslexia obtains a degree of academic success, as this will provide a springboard for further training and often the necessary academic skills, which may be a prerequisite for some workplace training programmes. Many leave school with little or no academic qualification but many of these people enrol for courses later in life and often perform exceptionally well, especially if there are supports available in organisations like FÁS. At that stage they are usually highly motivated and may have a more detailed knowledge of their dyslexic difficulties and the most appropriate coping and compensatory strategies. Essentially they become better learners. It is our view that people with poor metacognitive awareness, which means that they often need to be shown the most effective way to learn. They are unable to do this as children but in adulthood they have the self-knowledge and more experience in learning and are able to suggests that while a support programme for dyslexic adults may help to improve their skills in reading and writing it should also help them to become better learners. For example a person can learn to spell a few crucial words, which will help that person to take on a new task, but more importantly the person can appreciate that he or she has made developed skills in learning which in this particular example has made him or her an autonomous learner in this particular task. For that it is important to develop and discuss with the dyslexic person – how that is, by what rules – certain words

should be spelt the way it is; this understanding nature of the task and the learning process helps with the generalization of new learning to other situations. It is the acquisition of these skills, which will most benefit the person with dyslexia.

1.7 Working it out: Strengths and Abilities in the workplace

Some of the strengths and abilities of adults with dyslexia are shown below, but more often than not dyslexic people have to work things out for themselves in order to be able to use these skills. Often that is exactly the problem – they have particular strengths, which could be advantageous in employment but are not able to appreciate how to use these strengths and how to apply them in the workplace.

It is important to realize that not all dyslexic people will have all the characteristics shown below, but many have some or all of them and others have to apply the skills they do possess in order to resolve a work problem. The main characteristics are:

- Good visual and spatial skills in creative areas such as mathematics, engineering and the physical sciences (West, 1997a);

- Abilities to recognize patterns of information and to represent three dimensional images in work with computers;

- A special facility for mentally rearranging designs and information which would have a contribution to creative and novel design – as demonstrated,

for example by Leonardo da Vinci, Auguste Rodin and Albert Einstein
(Osmond, 1993);

- A more holistic way of viewing the world, which aids the discovery of
  solutions to problems (Osmond, 1993)

- Rich colour memory and the ability to use multi-sensorial combinations;

- Willing to meet expectations and have high regard in work (Plata and
  Bone, 1989).

1.8 Learning Styles

*'Learning styles are essentially 'characteristic cognitive, affective and
physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners
perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment' (Keefe, 1993).'*
Other theorists such as Mc Loughlin et al (1993) focus on the importance of
learning styles as tool for positive response from people with learning difficulties.
Many models of learning styles take into account both environmental and
cognitive factors. Therefore the workplace as well as the person's learning
preferences are important.

1.9 Workplace factors

The Dunn and Dunn learning styles model offers a well –researched example of
a learning styles model, which gives considerable focus to environmental factors.
Many research studies using this model have shown that environmental as well

as cognitive factors can affect learning and ultimate success. Some of the factors in the Dunn and Dunn model relate to:

1.9.1 Sound

Some people can work and learn more effectively in certain sound conditions. Usually a global type of learner prefers music or at least some form of auditory stimulation.

1.9.2 Light

Again some people prefer dim light while others prefer brighter lights. The Dunn and Dunn research studies show that lighting can affect learning and therefore would be an important consideration in the workplace, especially if new or demanding learning is to take place.

1.9.3 Design

The research has indicated that many global learners prefer an informal learning situation and particularly one, which utilizes visual and kinaesthetic processing. A formal classroom type of situation is not usually the most effective learning environment for global learners.

1.9.4 Group learning or learning alone

Some people can learn most effectively if working on a task alone; global learners and many people with dyslexia are global learners, usually people working in groups. This allows social interaction form, which global people benefit, and group discussion, which also is one of their preferences for learning.

1.9.5 Perceptual preference

Instructions for work tasks can be provided to employees in a number of ways. Usually this would involve visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or tactile learning. It is important that the instructions are provided in a variety of ways because if they are given purely orally, the learner is then relying on the auditory modality. Many dyslexic learners are stronger in other modalities and may indeed have a weakness in the auditory modality. Many are in fact stronger in the visual modality so they should be allowed to make visual images or mind maps as they are learning, or indeed the information should be provided visually.

1.9.6 Time of day

It is important that many employees, when training on the job, may remark to their boss that they will take home the new information that is to be learnt. This may be because they prefer the informal setting of their home for learning but it may also be due to the time of day preference. Many prefer to learn in the evening as opposed to the morning and this is the case for many with the global learning style (Dunn and Dunn 1993).

1.9.7 Mobility

The Dunn and Dunn research also highlights the importance of mobility for some people in relation to effective learning. This suggests that some people have a learning style that requires them to be fairly active when learning and can only really remain in one learning position for a short period of time. It is important therefore that trainers are aware of this and that classroom learning takes account of the need for some learners to be mobile. Sometimes a group

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discussion can help to bring in a certain amount of mobility into a learning situation.

1.9.8 Structure

Learners who have a global reference need a structure. Often they have difficulty imposing their own structure and it is important for the manager to ensure that job instructions and new learning tasks are presented in a structured way. This helps the learner in relation to what has been achieved and what else has to be completed. The structured activity can act almost like a checklist and helps to keep the learner on task.

1.9.9 Global and analytical

Many dyslexic people have a global learning preference and this means that they prefer simultaneous processing of information as opposed to sequential. They can therefore work on several tasks at the same time.

- Global learners benefit from a context for learning and need to see the purpose of the task. Therefore, it is beneficial if this is explained to them at the outset.

- They also need clear expectations and should know how and if their learning is to monitored.

- They would benefit form an overview of the new material to be learnt before embarking on the actual task of learning. This overview may be in the form of talking through the task and the learner already knows identifying what.

- They also benefit from making connections.

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It is also helpful to assist the learner to make connections among the different content areas of the new learning. To focus on patterns and to link different aspects of the information to be learnt. The use of subheadings and the identification of concepts are important in this respect.

1.9.10 Personal and meaningful

Certainly frequent use of illustrations will make the information more meaningful to learners with a global learning style. Biographical information when appropriate and the use of situations personally familiar to the learner can help to personalize the content and also make it more meaningful to the learner.

It is important to consider cognitive and environmental aspects of learning in the workplace. Not only will this benefit people with dyslexia but also others in the workforce. The research shows that recognizing an individual's learning preferences can enhance learning and success.

For example, Ingham (1991) showed how the results of an experimental study showed that truck drivers, truck mechanics and their managers learned significantly more when their individual learning style perceptual preferences are matched with the appropriate instructional method. Additionally, the study showed that these employees expressed significantly more positive attitudes towards company sponsored training programmes when instruction complements their individual learning style preferences. She argues that the message from this study is clear: employers and trainers must analyse a person's perceptual strength and training materials should be designed to complement these preferences. This is confirmed by a two-year joint study for the American Society

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for Training and Development and the United States Department of Labour

(Carnevale et al., 1988) which stated 'trainers should attempt to identify the type

of sensory stimulus – whether visual, auditory or tactile – that helps each

employee learn best, and then design multiple use training that addresses all

preferences'.

1.10 Training and retraining

Reid and Kirk (2001) have stated that effective training in relation to job skills

either at college or in the work place is important because often the learner has

to obtain the skills in a fairly short space of time. In some situations in the

workplace induction training may be limited or non-existent. While this can place

demands on many people, those with dyslexia are at a greater disadvantage

because, in addition to their dyslexic difficulties relating to short-term memory,

sequencing and literacy, they also may not be aware of how to learn effectively

and efficiently. This is the metacognitive aspect of learning and essentially

relates to being aware of how one learns.

1.10.1 Metacognition

Three important aspects of metacognition are:

- Self-direction

- Self-monitoring

- Self-assessment

When the learner acquires competence in these aspects then learning can be efficient and successful. By efficient we mean learning the maximum information in the shortest time span, but learning it in such a manner that the information is meaningful and can be transferred to other new learning situations. These are the key aspects of metacognition.

Self-direction essentially involves such questions as:

- What is my goal?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- What do I need?
- What is my deadline?

It is important that these basic questions are addresses by the dyslexic learner. This will help with keeping on task and make learning more efficient.

Similarly with self-monitoring, it is important that questions such as those below are addressed:

- How am I doing?
- Do I need resources?
- What else can I do?

This should lead to self-assessment, when the learner should ask such questions as:

- Did I accomplish my goal?
- Was I efficient?

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- What worked?

- What did not work?

- Why did it not work?

Raising these questions will highlight to the learner how efficient or otherwise the learning was and how the process could be improved for a subsequent learning situation.

The metacognitive process could be summed up in the following four stages:

1. Understanding – that is, questions relating to the task. It is essential to focus on this before embarking on the task and, importantly, this should lead to a plan of action. An example is of a worker who has to reorganize a storeroom. She will need to know exactly what that means. Is it to make it easier to find information? Should the materials be stored in a certain way? In other words, what is the purpose of the activity? Answers to the questions should help the person to decide how to go about the task.

2. Sequence of learning – What will be the different stages of learning? Should this be written down and planned?

3. Monitoring – Is the plan working? Do you have to change anything? Will you reach your learning target?

4. Checking – Have you succeeded how do you know you have reached your goal? Can you describe how you did it?

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In general, metacognition involves the ability to transfer previous learning to new learning. The learner should focus as much on the 'how' as the 'what', therefore the process is important. If possible this process should be recorded and evaluated by the learner so that it can be used again for new learning.

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Section Two – Industry Context

2.1 FÁS

FÁS - Training and Employment Authority, was established in January 1988,

under the Labour Services Act 1987 to provide a wide range of services to the

labour market in Ireland. Its functions as laid down in the Act are:

- training and re-training;

- designated apprenticeships;

- recruitment service;

- employment schemes;

- placement and guidance services;

- assistance to community groups;

- advice for people returning to Ireland and those seeking employment

    elsewhere in the EU;

- consultancy and human resource related services, on a commercial basis,

    outside the State (through FÁS International Consulting Ltd.)

The statutory functions of the organisation also include the collection and

publication of information relating to the labour market and the provision, to the

Minister, of information, reports etc. on matters within FÁS' remit.

FÁS the Training and Employment Authority is divided into 8 regions comprising

20 Training Centres and 62 Employment Offices. In 2002 about 90,500

unemployed job seekers or other individuals completed FÁS programmes, and,

at the end of the year, 48,300 persons were on FÁS programmes. In 2002 FÁS also provided financial support for the training of an estimated 10,300 employees in about 2,100 companies under the Training Support Scheme. During the year about 110,000 persons registered with FÁS and 103,000 vacancies were notified to FÁS Employment Offices. Apprentice recruitment was at 25,400 in 2002. FÁS expenditure in 2002 amounted to €858.5 million. All FÁS activities are funded by the Irish Government, the National Training Fund and the European Union.

2.2 Overview of Training Services

FÁS has a pivotal role in contributing to the success of the National Employment Action Plan and to the achievement of the objectives of 'Sustaining Progress' by providing in-employment training such as Apprenticeship, social inclusion measures such as CE and occupational training for the Unemployed through Specific Skills Training and Traineeship Programmes. FÁS also provides a range of integration programmes such as Bridging/Foundation courses for those who require specific supports to undertake the occupational training of their choice.

Training Services is the main training delivery unit of FÁS. It does this through its network of training centres and through approved training organisations/ contractors.

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Approximately 7,000 apprentices completed Phase 2 of their apprenticeship in FÁS and FÁS approved training centres. Approximately 22,000 unemployed persons completed FÁS training courses during 2003 with:

- approximately 10,800 completing a Specific Skills Training Programme,
- 2,000 a Traineeship Programme and
- 6,000 completing a core or foundation skills course leading either to employment or further education/training.
- The remainder completed courses in Community Training Centres under the control of Community Services.

FÁS also provided training for 2,700 company employees in its Training Centres and nearly 12,000 persons attended night courses.

2.2.1 FÁS National Traineeship Programme

The FÁS National Traineeship Programme is an occupational skills development-training programme, tailored to the needs of Irish industry and local businesses. Traineeships provide flexible training solutions to the needs of industry using the best mix of FÁS and local business resources to deliver occupational training for programme participants. The training content and occupational standards for all Traineeships are based on FÁS, Employer and Trade Union consultation and lead to a nationally recognised qualification certified by FETAC under the aegis of the NQAI, (the National Qualification Authority of Ireland). A key characteristic

of the Traineeship Programme is the significant role Employers play in the training process. Examples of the type of Traineeships that are run in the Finglas Training Centre are the Legal Secretary Traineeship and the Software Developer Traineeship.

2.2.2 Standards Based Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is a method by which:

- a person works for an employer as an apprentice in a chosen trade and learns the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to become a qualified craftsperson.

Apprenticeship means that the person will undergo specific tests and assessments to ensure certain pre-set standards of skill and competence during the course of an apprenticeship. To help achieve the necessary standards, the apprenticeship comprises phases of on-the-job training with an employer and off-the-job training normally in FÁS Training Centres or Educational bodies.

On successful completion of the apprenticeship, they will receive a National Craft Certificate, recognised in Ireland as well as other EU and non-EU countries. The normal duration of apprenticeship is 4 years. In order for an employer to register someone as an apprentice they must be at least 16 years old and have at least a grade D in any 5 subjects in the Junior Certificate (or equivalent grades in other approved examinations). If a person does not meet the educational requirement there are other ways in which it is possible to qualify for a job as an apprentice. They can satisfactorily complete a preparatory training course approved by FÁS

and be successful at an assessment interview. This can be the opportune time to assess if a person has any learning disabilities. A person may also qualify if they are over 25 years of age, have had a minimum of 3 years work experience relevant to their chosen occupation and are successful at an assessment interview. Many employers look for higher entry requirements for their particular needs and interested parties should ask their prospective employer about these. An employer must register the apprentice with FÁS as an apprentice within two weeks of the start of the apprenticeship.

Trades covered by the Scheme

Standards-Based Apprenticeship applies to the following trades:

Carton Maker*	Wood Machinist
Originator*	Cabinet Maker
Bookbinder*	Bricklayer
Printer*	Sheet Metal Worker
Plasterer	Painter/Decorator*
Vehicle Body Repairer*	Agricultural Mechanic*
Aircraft Mechanic*	Refrigeration Craftsperson*
Construction Plant Fitter*	Metal Fabricator
Heavy Vehicle Mechanic*	Plumber
Toolmaker	Motor Mechanic*
Electrician*	Carpenter/Joiner

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| Instrumentation Craftsperson* | Fitter* |
| Floor/Wall Tiler | Electrical/Instrumentation* |

A person wishing to become an apprentice in one of the above trades marked * must pass a colour-vision test approved by FÁS. Successful completion of the Apprenticeship is a compulsory requirement for recognition as a Craftsperson in the trades listed above.

Preparatory training for women

To help women in particular to prepare for an apprenticeship FÁS and the education system provide preparatory training where necessary. By providing relevant practical and theoretical training these courses aim to prepare women to train and work on what has been a traditionally male environment. During the full time duration of apprenticeship FÁS gives support, encouragement, advice and assistance to female apprentices.

The role of FÁS in Apprenticeships

FÁS has responsibility for the organisation and control of apprentice training in the designated occupations. In consultation with the employer, trade unions and Department of Education and Science, FÁS is responsible for making the Rules of Apprenticeship for the designated occupations. FÁS also maintains a Register of Apprentices and is responsible for overseeing their training and related education. Registration by FÁS confirms that the individual meets the entry

requirements and has been accepted as an apprentice. The system requires that the progress of the apprentice through all phases of the apprenticeship is recorded by FÁS.

There are currently six types of Phase Two apprenticeships running in the Finglas Training Centre. Each class runs for 20 weeks each. There are several classes of each type, these being: Carpentry and Joinery (Eight Classes of 14 in each), Cabinet Making (One Class of 14), Electrician (Four Classes of 14 in each), Plumbing (Four Classes of 14 in each), Sheetmetal Workers (One Class of 14) and Motor Mechanics (Two Classes of 12 in each).

2.2.3 Specific Skills Training Courses

These are programmes designed to deliver a particular skills or knowledge gap that a trainee may need to acquire in order to facilitate job seeking or possibly to further their career. Certification can lead to a nationally recognised qualification certified by FETAC under the aegis of the NQAI, (the National Qualification Authority of Ireland). . Examples of these courses that are currently running in the Finglas Training Centre are: ECDL, Computerised Accounts and Payroll, Interior Design, Preparing for Work, Computer Applications and Office Skills.

Section 3 Methodology

3.1 Primary Research

The methodology of the research involved the design of quantitive questionnaires, which were focused on a sample group of instructors at the Finglas Training Centre. The questionnaires contained a mix of open ended and closed questions, which measured the respondent's knowledge of dyslexia in terms of accessibility, flexibility, supports and general awareness. I asked seventeen instructors to complete the questionnaire on the Awareness of Dyslexia in FÁS Finglas Training Centre. I received a response from seven of those instructors. In the group that responded, three were apprentice instructors, two were traineeship instructors and two were specific skills instructors. It is important differentiate from the different class types as there will be a different age range and social background between the types.

3.2 Limitations to conducting research

The target population for the research was twenty-seven participants – of which only seven responded. Some of the low response could be attributed to annual leave, as the Training Centre will have a lot of temporary cover staff during the summer months.

The instructors who did respond were extremely appropriate and much information was obtained from them. Prior to the questionnaires being completed the instructors were given information in relation to the study I was conducting and the questions were explained in detail.

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Confidentiality was assured and any personal information given in relation to individuals was disregarded in the analysis.

3.3 Questionnaires

See Appendix 1 for an example of the questionnaire

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Section 4 - Findings

4.1   Analysis of the Findings

4.1.1 Question One asks the instructors 'How many are in the class?' This is self-explanatory.

4.1.2 Question Two asks 'Have you ever conducted a dyslexia test on your class?' All respondents answered 'No'.
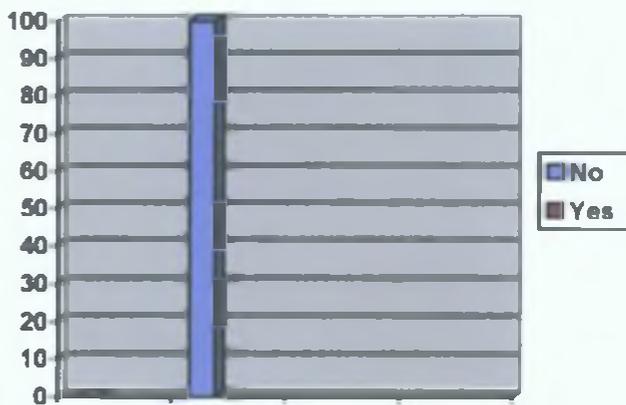
4.1.3   Question Three asks 'If yes to the above, were any students highlighted as having a learning disability or difficulty? This question was deemed Not Applicable, as all respondents answered no to the first question.

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4.1.4 Question Four asks 'if no to question two, have you detected or noticed any students who may have a learning disability or difficulty?' Seven of the instructors answered yes and only one answered no. Coincidently the instructor who answered no is the Software Developer Traineeship instructor and that particular course has a high level of aptitude testing.
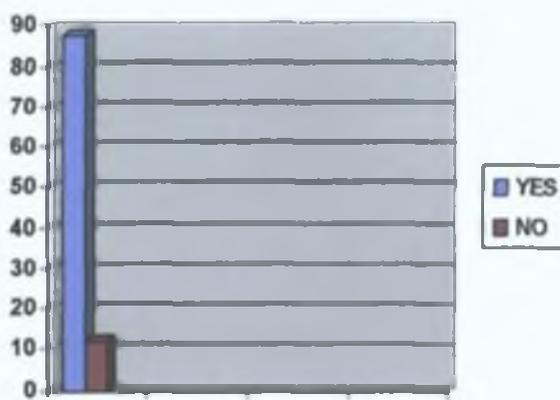
4.1.5 Question Five asks 'How or when did you first notice?' Of the eight respondents, the three Apprentice instructors answered that they (the apprentices) informed them and one noted that overall they seem to generally have a problem with Maths. Two respondents did not answer as it was not applicable and two respondents commented that 'they noticed when reading instructions to a class' and 'one student seemed to have difficulty understanding basic instruction in a test and completed the test incorrectly as a result. It was not that she did not have the ability to complete the test; she just found it difficult to understand and follow the instruction. She also found great difficulty in completing a basic calculations test using a calculator.

4.1.6   Question Six asks 'Do you know of any methods or tools that you can use to assist students with a learning disability? If yes, please list?' Three instructors did not know of any and the others had various methods such as 'oral testing', 'screen/keyboard enhancement for the visually impaired', 'providing a reader', 'enlarging text and only allowing one line to be shown at a time'

4.1.7   Question Seven asks 'Are there any extra supports available locally within the organisation to assist such students?' Of the seven respondents, six were aware that there is a Learning Support Person in the Training Centre for two hours a week and only instructor did not know of any.

4.1.8   Question Eight asks 'If yes to question 7, how accessible is the support?' Four instructors knew that Ms Helen O'Donnell from the National Training and Development Institute comes in for two hours a

week to give assistance and advice. Another instructor commented that the service was 'basic' and two instructors thought that she might be available for a one day a week. This was apparently a pilot programme and has since been cut back to just two hours a week.

4.1.9 Question Nine asks 'if yes to question 7, in previous classes, have you noticed if these supports made an improvement to the quality of the students work?' Two instructors made no response and two other instructors said that when the students received help from Learning Support that they did not notice a difference. One instructor said that 'to their knowledge, no trainees availed of the service'. One instructor commented that 'One of our students went to Helen as she was having difficulty with tests – both written and numbers. She found the assistance and advice given by Helen very helpful. Although the trainee is now left the course (because she got a job), I feel that she would not have stayed beyond the first few week without the backup from Helen'.

4.1.10 Question Ten asks 'Do you have any suggestions as to how to assist students who may have a learning disability or difficulty? One Instructor did not have any suggestions, another said to 'refer them to the learning support person and the other instructors had a range of suggestions such as 'classes on study skills and /or memory

techniques', 'trainees should indicate that they have a difficulty and of possible ways that information can be presented to them so as they can grasp what is being asked of them'. Another instructor commented that they should be in a position to ' encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning and give them guidance'. Finally the instructor in one of the traineeships commented 'Allow time for one-to-one sessions with them, introduce an "Individual Development Programme (IDP)" which will look at the needs of the individual – both for training and for personal development. I worked for a centre in the past, which taught people with learning difficulties and they used IDP's to identify the needs of the trainees. The training centre manager, the instructor, who was also a key-worker for the trainee, the trainee and advocate nominated by the trainee (often a medial person, or a relative) all attended the meeting and looked at all the individual needs of the person. A three-month plan, including their training goals, was then set out for that person as an individual giving them certain goals to aim reach. These are the only goals the person needed to aim for, and they were suited to their own needs and abilities. They did not have to compare themselves to other trainees in the training centre and their goals could be adjusted every twelve weeks when and if necessary. I found this to be an excellent system of ensuring that people with learning difficulties learned and progressed

at their own speed, which suited their own abilities. It also helped them

to take responsibility for setting and reaching their own goals'.

5.0 Conclusion

There are two significant points that have been highlighted as the main areas to target from the study. One is the level of awareness in relation to dyslexia from the point of view of the apprentice Instructors and specific skills / traineeships instructors and the other is the level of awareness from the point of view from the Employment Service Officers who provide a career guidance service to members of the public. This highlights the limitations to the quantitive research conducted as it did not focus on the area of Employment Services at all, which is the public point of contact to all of FÁS Services with the exception of Apprenticeships.

FÁS provides a range of training and employment programmes, aimed at employers, employees and unemployed people. Recruitment for FÁS programmes is through Employment Services Unit who provides counselling/career guidance for those who wish to pursue training options in either Traineeship Programmes or Specific Skills programmes. Participants prior to commencement on the programmes are interviewed and in some cases (Traineeship) aptitude tested for suitability. The aim of which is to assess literacy skills and their suitability to work in an office environment. This could be an excellent opportunity for Employment Officers to seek information as to whether the individual has any issues in relation to learning difficulties such as dyslexia

The Apprenticeship system is different where by the individual is registered by their employer with FÁS for a standard based apprenticeship and at this stage

FÁS have no input into the recruitment process. It is worth noting that a lot of Apprentices only need a basic qualification of a Junior Certificate (five passes) in order to obtain an Apprenticeship. In some cases where they haven't completed their Junior Certificate they can a Pre-Apprenticeship course to qualify them. Apprentice classes usually have an exact number of 14 places per class. In the Finglas Training Centre all apprentice classes will be completing Phase Two of their apprenticeship (20 weeks off the job).

If 8% of the population experience significant dyslexic difficulties, then two out of every twenty-five people who walk through the doors of a FÁS office may have dyslexia. The figure could be much higher. Literacy difficulties may cause young people to drop out of school, or prevent students getting the high points necessary for college. Poor reading and spelling skills may limit the employment options. This is where FÁS may have to bridge 'the gap' caused by such problems as it is likely that a disproportionate number of people who turn to FÁS for training actually experience problems of this kind. This applies to all the training interventions supplied by FÁS such as the Apprenticeship, Specific Skills and Traineeships. The task and challenge for FÁS staff is to become more aware of learning difficulties such as dyslexia and establish when a literacy problem arises from dyslexia and when it has another cause. This is very important because the assistance a person with dyslexia will require is quite different from that of a person with a non-dyslexic literacy difficulty.

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Employment Services: preparation for employment; Job choice and careers advice

It is not uncommon for dyslexic trainees to find themselves in a course, which highlights their weakness and further undermines their confidence. It is important that dyslexic students obtain effective careers advice from Employment Services Officers in FÁS and it is crucial that the demands of the course are made clear to them at the outset. The three implications to stem from this are:

1. The need to make Employment Services Officers aware of dyslexia.

1. To ensure that aptitude tests, open days and course introductions are user friendly in terms of the demands of the course, that this can be fully appreciated by the student, and that the students dyslexic difficulties are acknowledged and fully appreciated by the course co-ordinator / FÁS instructor.

2. To ensure that those people with dyslexia are fully aware of the extent of their dyslexic difficulties.

Future Implications

There are also implications for the employers at a later stage, as often jobs require retraining and sometimes the full nature of a job is not made clear to the applicant at the interview stage. The employer has a role to play in helping dyslexic people to select appropriate jobs to match their skills and not jobs that

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would highlight their difficulties. If this situation does arise the difficulties inherent

in this situation can be minimized through knowledge and use of learning styles

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6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Employment Services

Employment Service Officers or Career Guidance Officers therefore have a role to play when recruiting for courses and should consider the following:

1. How to obtain at least awareness training in the area of dyslexia and other learning disabilities

2. To recognise that not all dyslexic people will display the same strengths and difficulties.

3. to obtain information on the assessment which will clearly indicate the person's strengths and weaknesses before placing them on a training intervention.

4. the need to consider the dyslexic person as an individual and his or her needs and ambitions and preferences should be acknowledged. This may mean the dyslexic person does pursue a course or profession which may not be the most suitable, if this is the case attempts should be made with employers in the event of job placement and with instructors in the event of training to ensure that support can be available.

6.2 Liaison between education and work

The relevance of the mainstream school curriculum to employment skills is a key factor to the success of adult life. research findings have provided striking conclusions concerning the transitional period of dyslexic adults to successful

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employment. Hoffmann et al.'s (1987) study identified a mismatch between curricular and employment needs.

In order to improve the situation, it is necessary to reappraise the curriculum priorities provided by the various institutions and to assess whether or not such employment training needs were indeed at least partly, if not fully met. This would help ensure that adults with dyslexia are prepared for successful employment at an earlier stage in their career. In the long term this would also reduce the economic and resource burdens of the employment agencies and training organizations.

6.3 Matching jobs and skills

The matching of an occupation or course of training to a particular trainee can depend on a combination of good judgment and appropriate advice. But, realistically, in many cases even the best-matched occupation can still require some special consideration by employers and the use of compensatory strategies by the adult with dyslexia. In these situations the use of learning styles can be an important factor for both the dyslexic person and the employer.

It is also important to stress that FÁS staff are not expected to know everything about a specific condition. It is perfectly reasonable to question someone on how their impairment may or may not affect their preferred training options and how FÁS services and programmes may be of assistance. However, it is rarely relevant to go into the person's medical history.

Staff may find that they have to respond to individuals with learning disabilities / difficulties such as dyslexia:

- Who have compensated for their difficulty so that it no longer has any significant effect on the type of work that they do;

- Who need some help or adaptation to overcome the difficulty but who, once this is provided, are not limited in the type of job that they can do;

- Whose employment options may be restricted by their learning difficulty, but who, given the right job are as effective as anyone else.

However staff need to ensure that they are comfortable communicating with an individual about his or her disability. However there are times when additional information and support is required and staff are recommended to contact some of the organisations of, and for, people with disabilities.

6.4 Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is the systematic integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market; by actively creating conditions whereby people with disabilities can compete and operated in the labour market on an equitable basis with their non-disabled peers.

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6.5 Accommodating Trainees/Apprentices with Dyslexia

The teaching environment can be challenging for trainees or apprentices with dyslexia, but the support of teaching staff can help them use their particular learning style to make the most of their studies. Another issue is that awareness in the form of obligatory workshops should be given to make all staff aware of what learning difficulties are and the support services that are available to them and the trainees. Instructors should also make themselves aware of the different learning styles that can apply to trainees or apprentices. In spite of their individual characteristics, students with dyslexia are known to share a common learning style, which is characterised by

- A tendency towards holistic thinking, evidenced by looking for overall patterns and relationships and different sides to a situation or task

- A manifestation of original and lateral problem solving skills

- Developed visual or spatial skills

- A preference for intuitive, non-verbal thought, rather than rational explanations

- A reliance on long-term memory and a need to associate ideas in order to fix them in memory

- A need to compensate for short-term or rote memory by over-learning facts and practising systematically to achieve spontaneity

- A difficulty in tracking direction and time and using numbers

FÁS should make all of their instructing staff of these learning traits and they should then take them into consideration when:

1. Lecturing

2. Setting reading work

3. Setting written assignments

4. Providing feedback on written presentations

5. Preparing students for examinations

6. Offering examination facilities

1. Lecturing

Lecturers can undertake a number of steps to adapt their teaching methods to the learning style of students with dyslexia, including

- using the beginning of the lecture to review topics covered previously and to provide an overview of areas to be covered in existing lecture

- providing photocopies of notes at beginning of lecture with topic headings, examples, formulae (where relevant), and other key details

- providing photocopies of overhead transparencies (OHTs) used during the lecture

- using large font, e.g. 12 point Arial, for any handouts and limiting the amount of information per page

- briefly annotating reading lists

- breaking general topics into smaller, less complex sections

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- pausing and summing up during the lecture when giving specific instructions or explanations

- avoiding unnecessary complex jargon so that students do not become overloaded with language and symbols

- using a practical, multi-sensory approach to cater to students' visual learning style, by presenting material using videos, flow-charts, diagrams or tape recordings

- allowing dyslexic students to use tape-recorders or mini-discs during lectures

- communicating patterns or themes in material, as this enables students to associate ideas and caters to their visual/spatial skills

- encouraging students to ask questions and re-explaining complex material using simpler language

2. Setting reading work

Reading is an essential element of many courses, but lecturers can tailor reading requirements to students with dyslexia by

- making allowance for the fact that students may be competent at reading to themselves, but may have impaired ability when reading in front of others for presentations

- only asking students with dyslexia to read aloud if they want to, and giving them advance notice before the lecture

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- offering students extra time for reading tasks and giving examples of what students should look for

- helping students to make choices about essential reading

- giving a list of key words in advance of assigning a reading passage to students, as those with dyslexia have difficulties scanning text for gist.

3. Setting written assignments

Some training facilities rely on written assignments to gauge students' progress. Dyslexic students are often at a disadvantage in this area, but lecturers and support staff can assist them by

- establishing a reduced word count for essays

- helping students to plan essays by breaking them into smaller steps

- setting interim targets for stages of an assignment, rather than a single final deadline, thereby helping students with dyslexia to organise their time more effectively

- offering to go over early drafts of assignments and encouraging dyslexic students to use non-linear notes

- encouraging students to focus less on spelling and presentation than on content, until they prepare their final draft

- focusing students on key essay requirements, such as introductions, conclusions, presentation of arguments, providing evidence to back up claims, and style

- suggesting students write on only one side of the page, for hand-written assignments, and that they double space their paragraphs so that corrections can be inserted clearly

- suggesting that students record any specific instructions or conversations to aid their memory

4. Providing feedback on written presentations

Many students are eager to gain feedback on the material they submit for correction, but those with dyslexia may be more anxious than most if the form of their written work overshadows its content. However, lecturers can provide constructive feedback with sensitivity by

- showing understanding of the challenges faced by the student

- recognising the student's strengths when evaluating their work, either in writing or in person

- asking the student for two copies of an assignment and correcting one for content and the other for presentation, noting spelling, grammar and syntax

- taking the opportunity to correct hard-to-understand work in the presence of the student

- highlighting any patterns in errors and colour coding them, for example by using green for grammar, red for spelling etc.

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- if giving feedback in person, keeping sessions short so as not to overload the student with corrections

- focusing on a small number of error types at a time

5. Preparing students for examinations

Pre-examination study demands motivation and dedication from all students, but when the examination itself places additional pressure on those with dyslexia, study time should be geared effectively towards their learning style. Support staff can offer these students pre-exam assistance by

- establishing with students a schedule for short-term, mid-term and long-term planning and having students keep records of the schedule

- allowing realistic time-frames within which students can revise particular topics

- reviewing past examination papers, together with course handouts or overviews

- rehearsing reading and interpreting of questions, for example, by using the SCORER acronym (Scheduling time, searching for Clue words, Omitting difficult questions, reading carefully, estimating time for answers and reviewing work)

- helping students to plan possible exam answers, using past papers as a guide

- encouraging students to use highlighter pens as multi-sensory supports to help them pick out key words in questions as they read and re-read them

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□ encouraging students to proof read their answers critically, using a
checklist of "personal errors"

□ introducing students to mind-mapping concepts, which can be used to
help them organise key information in a visual format

□ offering stress-management tips to help students cope with anxiety and
use adrenalin to good effect

□ agreeing with students to have an emergency plan in place, such as using
bullet-points if time management fails in the exam situation

□ getting students to rehearse sticking to a strict timeframe by answering
past exam questions in timed conditions

6. *Offering examination facilities*

Examinations can be more daunting for students with dyslexia than most others

because of the additional effort they need to make to interpret the meaning of

exam questions, recall information rapidly and structure their ideas coherently

within a limited time-frame. Whereas certain examination features - such as a

deadline for completion of the paper - cannot be eliminated, third level institutions

can help minimise the impact of dyslexia on exam performance by

□ avoiding overly complicated language in exam questions and clearly
separating questions on the exam paper

□ offering some extra time - on average 10 minutes for every hour of normal
exam duration — to compensate for the effort students need to put into
reading, writing and recalling memorised information

- opting for multiple-choice or short answer questions, rather than questions that require essay-type answers

- avoiding computer sheets for multiple choice tests

- allowing students to use a dictionary, hand-held spelling checker or personalised list of spellings

- printing exam questions in enlarged font and on shaded paper, such as light blue or pink, to eliminate the "glare" that can arise from the traditional black text on white background

- enabling students to use a quiet room, to minimise the risk of distractions

- splitting the exam into two or more sections to enable students to take rest breaks from handwriting and structuring answers

- permitting the use of a personal cassette player with "leak-proof" headphones to enable students to listen to exam questions on an audio tape

- allowing students to record their answers orally while still providing skeletal notes to show planning and structure

- offering students the use of a word processor, with or without a spell-checker – although this option requires that students would be proficient in word-processing before exam time

- making available a word processor with voice recognition software, if necessary, so that students can explain their answers orally and edit them on-screen

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- allowing students to view the exam paper in advance and have certain unfamiliar words explained to them before being escorted to the exam centre

- permitting students to use a scribe to write down answers

This list is not exhaustive; neither does it contain suggestions that could equally apply to all learners with dyslexia. For example, if learners record their answers orally, they may risk digressing from their point or lapsing into informal, everyday language, unless they also jot down on some brief notes that indicate an ordered sequence of points or arguments. In addition, it would be almost impossible for them to edit any errors afterwards. Other problems may arise for learners who use word processors because spell checkers are likely to identify phonetically-based spellings, learners may still have difficulty in distinguishing between the alternative options that the checker provides.

When providing supports to learners with dyslexia, a possible additional factor to consider is low self –esteem. If a learner with dyslexia hasn't achieved well in school and teachers or parents have attributed this to laziness, immaturity or defiance, the learner may become very unsure of their skills by the time they reach training or further education. Consequently, they may avoid contribution during class and assume that their specific difficulties mean that they cannot do anything well. To help alleviate this, FÁS staff should be aware of the particular learning style of those with dyslexia and be sensitive to those whose dyslexia has caused them to lack confidence. Therefore, they should endeavour to strike a

balance between treating dyslexic individuals "just like everybody else" and singling them out for preferential treatment, which could embarrass learners and alienate them form their classmates. While learners with dyslexia should receive appropriate accommodations and support, it is not suggested that basic or 'inherent' requirements of a course be reduced.

6.6 Assistive Technology

For most people technology makes life easier, broadens horizons, and for the very young provides an earlier start to learning. For people with disabilities, however technology changes the most ordinary of daily activities from impossible to possible. People of all ages have come to increasingly rely on assistive aids and technology in every aspect of life. Aids such as fax machines and memory-dialling telephones are now routinely used in the workplace.

Assistive technology is often seen as special, expensive and an additional burden on the employer or service provider. Furthermore, employers and service providers often feel that they have to recommend a solution. When in fact, the person with **the disability is often the expert in relation to his or her own needs and own solutions.**

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What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology is the broad term used for any device, technical aid, strategy, service and/or practice, with the main objective of improving the quality of life of a person. Assistive Technology comes in two categories:

- General technology which benefits everyone, e.g., passenger lifts, automatic doors, adjustable office chairs, signs that are easy to read, etc. This kind of assistive technology often gets taken for granted after a while. We do not think of them in the context of assistive technology, just as things that are convenient. However, for a person with a disability they can make a difference, as they would be unable to function in an environment without them.

- Specific technology, which is personalised for the person with the disability. Specific technology may be adapted to meet the precise requirements of an individual with a disability e.g. wheelchair, or it may be bought of the shelf e.g. computer software for voice activation.

Not all people with disabilities need assistive technology and not all assistive technology costs a lot of money. For example, research conducted in the United States on making adjustments in the workplace to accommodate employees with disabilities, found that 68% of adjustments were made at no extra cost to the company, 28% were made at less than $1,000 (1,000 euro) and only 3% cost more than $1,000.

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Assistive technology for people with Dyslexia

While dyslexia cannot be cured, many people have developed coping strategies and fortunately modern technology can provide enormous relief for both trainees and workers.

While many people will not require any specific training supports, one or a combination of the following may be required in the training location:

- Computer hardware - a range of assistive technologies can assist people with dyslexia with reading and writing tasks including the word processor, scanners and screen readers.

- Computer software – packages with good spell checks (Franklin Spell Master, Quikstationary Reading Pen, TextHELP; Mastering memory; and Thinksheet inspiration) will be extremely useful for people with dyslexia.

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Learning Disability –
Dyslexia Awareness Questionnaire

Instructor Name: _____ **Class Name & Level** _____

1. How many students are in your class?

2. Have you ever conducted a Dyslexia test on the current class?

3. If yes to the above, were any students highlighted as having a learning disability or difficulty?

4. If no to question two, have you detected or noticed any students who may have a learning disability or difficulty?

5. How or when did you first notice?

6. Do you know of any methods or tools that you can use to assist students with a learning disability? If yes please list.

7. Are there any extra supports available locally within the organization to assist such students?

8. If yes to question 7, how accessible is the support?

9. If yes to question 7, in previous classes, have you noticed if these supports made an improvement to the quality of the students work?

10. Do you have any suggestions as to how to assist students who may have a learning disability or difficulty?