

# Dyslexia case studies & experiences

On 12 July 2016 the CSP Disabled Member’s Network held a study day on reasonable adjustments for dyslexia. The delegates noted that real-life case studies would be a useful resource and some offered to share their experiences.

## Case study one

**Ade Olopade – Band 6 physiotherapist at Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust**

I have dyslexia and my manager and I have worked together to try a number of strategies to enable me to work as effectively as possible in the workplace.

I find Dragon and ClaroRead software invaluable and also use a dictation app on my phone to dictate assessments and email them to myself. This makes note writing much quicker and easier compared to writing them out longhand.

I have had 1:1 coaching with a dyslexia coach on specific issues such as reading journal articles which has been really helpful. Previously, if I got stuck on a word or sentence I would find it difficult to keep going to read the whole article.

I think that the most important thing for members with dyslexia is that they should feel confident to speak up to their manager and work together to find solutions to any barriers.

Having dyslexia within the work place has been challenging:

* Written work – keeping up with documentation and writing reports within a timely manner
* Feeling confident that you are communicating well when communicating with other healthcare professionals.

From my stand point my strengths are more practical and the written part is an on-going challenge and can lead a feeling of reduced confidence as a healthcare professional.

## Case study two

**Johanne Watson – Therapy Lead at Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust**

I was keen to support Ade in the workplace and ordered the appropriate software and training that were recommended by an Access to Work Assessment he had had in his previous post in another organisation. I realised that I didn’t really know much about dyslexia, so attended the study day.

My knowledge of dyslexia increased as a result. I realised there was more we could do to change the structure of how we work in our team to further support staff with dyslexia.

On the training day we heard testimonies from people who have dyslexia and it helped me understand what type of activities are more challenging and which are easier for them. I realised many of our team processes would have made work more stressful for someone with dyslexia, and that these could easily be changed.

Ade and I worked with the Department of Work and Pensions’ Access to Work team and they have funded the majority of costs for the team’s senior staff who delegate work to Ade and supervise him on a day to day basis, to undergo three hours of training on dyslexia.

We have worked together with Ade to look at the structure of his day and have implemented strategies recommended to decrease the stress of managing a clinical caseload and to help the quality of his written documentation match the quality of his clinical work and clinical reasoning.

Hopefully I provide a safe space for staff to speak with me about any issues and work together with them to deliver the best quality patient care possible, to attain their maximum potential as a physiotherapist and to enjoy their work.

## Case study three

**Lynn Clark – South Warwickshire Foundation Trust**

When I initially started work I had no adjustments at all with regards to my dyslexia but as the paperwork continued to increase I began struggling more and more with my reports and letter writing.

Due to my dyslexia, I struggled greatly with typing and if I had to type a letter by hand it would probably take me at least an hour or more! When I changed employer it was suggested that I should get a proper dyslexia assessment to see what areas I needed help and support in.

The NHS kindly paid for my assessment and I received help and guidance from the Dyslexia Association along with support from Access to Work. I now have Dragon software which I use to help me with all my dictations with regards to reports, assessments and doctor’s letters which has been a godsend.

Dragon software has really helped me be independent plus increased my confidence in all my administration skills.

## Case study four

I feel the greatest help initially was from the charity Dyslexia Action who saw me for free when I was feeling extremely low and confused about my recent dyslexia diagnosis. I then gained Access to Work mentoring sessions with Dyslexia Action and before we started working on potential adaptions, it feels like we worked on my self-esteem (or not feeling so guilty about needing and asking for change/help) and also my sense of self (trying to pick out what's me and what's my dyslexia).

The biggest step towards the above I did at work was draw a spider diagram of my strengths, one of my weakness (both linked to dyslexia) and then explained, using a bell curve, why I have these strengths and weaknesses and how I need things adapted / considered.

This took an amazing amount of soul searching and guts but was partly spurred on by a very upsetting encounter with a colleague who brought me to tears one afternoon at work after being very critical, resistant to my adaption requests, saying: ‘Well, we've always done things this way’ and telling me that my not wanting to have my new patient assessments watched by her made her suspicious of my performance.

I approached my boss with the spider charts and was surprised and relieved by how well they were received. I found the whole process extremely emotional but through understanding me better my boss has greater awareness of both dyslexia and my individual needs and so has been consistently supportive and encouraging when I ask to adapt things.

She has also boosted my confidence by becoming more aware of my strengths and therefore acknowledging them, and also directing tasks to me that she feels fall within my particular strengths, and asking for help with the things she feel I excel at. I have been given Dragon software which I both love and hate - probably as I've never been shown how to use it and therefore get frustrated when I know it should do something I can't make it do.

My favourite adaption is the freedom I have been given to adapt the team’s assessment forms. I felt guilty at first but now things are often passed by me for editing before they are adopted. A simple change in order of questions on an assessment form makes a huge difference to my flow but is barely noticeable for my colleagues, and at times they agree things are smoother and quicker after I have changed them. My musculoskeletal (MSK) assessment forms have pictures instead of words which is much quicker for me to process.

All this has reduced my stress, increased my efficiency and therefore productivity to the point where my colleagues have fed back that I am faster at many things (as dyslexics we often worry we're slower at everything so this is a real compliment).

## Case study five

I was a mature adult learner when I decided to retrain. I went to my local college and did a BTEC in science to go to university. I attended the University of East London and found writing a challenge and my spelling was never very good, planning the essays was always difficult and a task that might take the average student a few hours would take me three times the amount, although it never put me off. I always knew I could do it but it would take me longer.

One day in the lunch room, I read a notice that stated there was ‘20 grammatical errors in this paragraph’ so I counted the ones I spotted and I got to 10, it said to contact the learning support area to have an assessment. My son was also having difficulty with spelling at primary school and was having learning support at school, so I thought I would get myself checked.

I found they were very pleasant and I explained how I struggled with some aspects of writing and they progressed me to the testing level and found I was dyslexic; and pretty bad at some things such as planning for essays! No wonder. But my creative and problem solving was what gave me the ability to study at this level.

The statement helped me in exam situations, being able to have a little more time and do the exams in a different smaller group which helped my confidence. I also got some assistance to buy some support software but they just gave you what they gave everyone and it was not all useful or well explained. I was also very lucky as I studied a Situated learning degree and so I was able to do a lot of practical practice which was one of my learning styles which also helped me learn techniques.

One of the questions at the dyslexia day was about disclosing dyslexia on a placement, unfortunately it was not always the best thing, some of the physiotherapists in the placements were unfortunately biased against people with dyslexia which made disclosing more difficult. As I progressed through my placements and by the end of my degree I did not disclose my issues. I worked hard to cover any issues and worked extra hours to do my notes to keep up but I passed all my placements and passed my degree with a good grade.

I knew nothing about the assistance that I could have received when starting my first employment and I have spoken lately about it to my Band 8 from my first trust that I worked at, when we spoke she noted that outwardly I did not seem to struggle but I know how many extra hours I worked and did not disclose to do my notes and I feel if I had known about it I would possibly wanted some coaching on time management and notes which would have helped me.