

# Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia

July, 2001

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## FOREWORD

From the commencement of my term of office as Minister, I have stated my concern for those students with learning difficulties and for those with special educational needs. Our educational system works well for most students but there are some who need extra help. In particular, I want to address the needs of students with dyslexia as a matter of urgency. I am extremely pleased to have had the advice of a Task Force on this matter. I note that the Task Force has consulted broadly, both in Ireland, through the acceptance of written and oral submissions, and abroad. I note in particular the sense of frustration and desperation conveyed in many of the submissions, and this has heightened my resolve to address dyslexia as a matter of urgency.

I particularly value the links with Northern Ireland and Britain, which highlight the extent to which educators in these islands face common challenges. I also value the co-operation between my Department and the U.S. Department of Education, which resulted in the expertise of the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs being made available to the Task Force.

Late last year, I announced a £2 million initiative involving the delivery of laptop computers to students with dyslexia and other reading and writing problems in 31 post-primary schools. The project will explore ways in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can assist students with learning difficulties to work independently within mainstream classes, and provide flexibility in the time and place of learning. I am confident that this initiative will complement the work of the Task Force by adding to our knowledge of what works on the ground in schools.

I congratulate the Task Force, and its chair, Peadar Cremin, for completing a wide-ranging report in a short period of time. This report of the Task Force will be of great assistance to me in taking further action to assist young people with dyslexia, within the broader context of meeting the needs of all students with learning difficulties and disabilities. I note that learning difficulties arising from dyslexia can range in severity from mild to severe, and it is my intention to match this continuum of severity with a continuum of provision that will be flexible and responsive to the needs of parents, teachers and students alike.

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Michael Woods, T.D.  
Minister for Education and Science

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the first place, I personally acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the members of the Task Force for the positive approach that they, individually and in Working Groups, brought to our work. The members of the Task Force dedicated large amounts of personal time to the challenge of delivering a report within a tight deadline, engaging in extensive research and drafting. Some brought expertise gleaned from many years of research and practice while others provided valuable links to various bodies and groups that address similar challenges in other jurisdictions.

I also acknowledge the contribution of the many individuals, organisations and bodies who took the time to prepare the submissions that have guided the work and the recommendations of the Task Force. In addition to 896 oral submissions, which were recorded on the Task Force's open telephone line, 399 written submissions were received. Many individual testimonies were received from adults who had to meet the challenge of dyslexia when it was less well understood than it is today. Other submissions were received from parents or guardians, many of whom were unclear as to the supports that they might avail of in meeting the needs of their children. Many identified gaps in the professional knowledge of those whom they approached for support. Teachers and others involved in the provision of services to children and adults with learning difficulties also made submissions, as did third-level institutions and organisations that support students with disabilities in higher education. The Task Force has given careful consideration to all.

The Task Force was fortunate in having the opportunity to meet with a delegation from the United States of America comprising of Dr. David P. Hallahan, University of Virginia, and Dr. Philip Strain, of the University of Colorado, experts in the field of special education, and Ms. Patty Guard, the most senior permanent official in the U.S. Department of Education's Special Education section. I am most grateful to Dr. Hallahan for his presentation on 'Learning Disabilities: The U.S. Experience', and to all the members of the delegation for their valuable insights.

I acknowledge the contributions of the Northern Ireland representatives on the joint North-South Special Education Co-ordination Group, who attended the presentation by Dr. Hallahan, and participated in the discussions afterwards. Ms. Marleen Collins, Education and Training Inspector, Department of Education, Northern Ireland, a member of the North-South Group and the Northern Ireland representative on the Task Force, willingly shared with us her experiences of the Northern Ireland Inter-Board Dyslexia Group – a group set up in Northern Ireland to co-ordinate policy on dyslexia across Library Boards. Her insights added significantly to our perceptions of the problems and possible solutions associated with the needs of students with dyslexia – North and South.

The Task Force was also fortunate to have the expertise of Dr. Rea Reason of the University of Manchester available to it throughout its deliberations. Dr. Reason willingly shared her expertise, gleaned from her academic work, her experiences as a psychologist in Oldham, and her recent involvement in preparing a publication on the assessment of dyslexia on behalf of the British Psychological Society.

I thank Dr. Michael Woods, T.D., Minister for Education and Science, for having had the perspicacity to establish this Task Force and I trust that the recommendations presented will help him in meeting his wishes to have the individual needs of students with dyslexia addressed. I am especially grateful to John Dennehy, Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science, to Liam Kilroy, Principal Officer, Special Education Section, to Martin Shiel, Executive Officer, Special Education Section, for their ongoing support to the work of the Task Force.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Thomas Kellaghan, Educational Research Centre, and to Dr. Eugene Wall, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, who reviewed and commented on an earlier draft of the report.

Thanks are also due to Gerry Shiel, a member of the Task Force, who skilfully synthesised draft chapters and sections prepared by Working Groups of the Task Force, and integrated them into the final report.

Ba mhaith liom focail bhúochais ar leith a ghabháil leo siúd a dhírigh ár n-aire ar chainteoirí na Gaeilge agus na deacrachtaí ar leith atá ag páistí sna Gaeltachtaí ó thaobh discléicse de. Tá súil agam go gcabhróidh na moltaí iniata lena gcás siúd.

Finally, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Eamonn McGuinness, who, as secretary to the Task Force, took on a diversity of onerous tasks and completed them with good humour and patience, professionalism and efficiency.

Peadar Cremin  
Chairperson

## **MEMBERSHIP OF TASK FORCE**

Dr. Peadar Cremin, (Chairperson), President, Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick

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**Note to Printers: (include photograph)**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent national and international studies of reading literacy point to wide variation in achievement among Irish students. The 1998 National Assessment of Reading Achievement estimated that 1 in 10 students in fifth class in primary schools had serious literacy difficulties. Based on the outcomes of an earlier international study, it was estimated that between 6½ and 8½% of Irish 14-year olds had literacy difficulties that were likely to impede their educational development and their life chances. The consequences of low literacy levels at the individual and societal levels are well documented, and are a matter of great concern, both within and outside of educational system.

Difficulties in reading, spelling and writing are associated with a range of factors. These include intra-individual factors, such as information processing skills and attention, and environmental factors, such as socioeconomic status, level of support for learning in the home, quality of teaching and quality of the learning environment at school. These factors interact in complex ways during learning. Intra-individual learning difficulties that are specific to a particular area of functioning are often called specific learning difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Where such difficulties are specific to reading, spelling and/or writing, they may be referred to as dyslexia. In cases where learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are particularly severe, they may warrant special educational provision.

A Task Force on Dyslexia was appointed by the Minister for Education and Science to review the current range of educational provision and support services available to children with specific reading disabilities in Ireland, to assess the adequacy of current educational provision and support services and to make recommendations for the development or adjustment of existing policy approaches, educational provision and support services. The Task Force was also invited to make recommendations on related matters.

The Task Force sought written submissions and received responses from 399 individuals, educational institutions and organisations. Parents, in particular, shared their views and frustrations with the Task Force. In addition to the written submissions, 896 oral submissions were received from individuals by telephone. The Task Force took these submissions into account in reviewing provision, and in formulating recommendations. The Task Force also looked at provision for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia in other educational systems in the course of its work.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'specific learning difficulty' and 'specific learning disability' both appear in the literature on reading difficulties, and in policy statements issued by educational systems. In the United States and Ireland, for example, 'specific learning disability' is widely used, whereas, in Britain and Northern Ireland, 'specific learning difficulty' is preferred. Both terms include dyslexia.

## ***What is Dyslexia?***

Educational systems often define dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty affecting reading, spelling or writing. In Ireland, the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee*<sup>2</sup> (1993) indicated a preference for the term 'specific learning disability' over 'dyslexia' and defined such disability as 'impairment in specific aspects of reading, writing and arithmetical notation, the primary cause of which is not attributable to assessed ability being below the average range, to defective sight or hearing, emotional factors, a physical condition, or to any extrinsic adverse circumstances'.

The Task Force proposes a somewhat broader conceptualisation of dyslexia that recognises the continuum of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia that students may experience, while also taking into account recent research findings on the aetiology of dyslexia:

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

Typically, educational systems set out criteria to identify dyslexia, and to determine if special educational provision is needed. In Ireland, as in other countries, two main criteria are currently considered: whether achievement, as measured by a standardised, norm-referenced test, is low, and whether general ability (usually full-scale IQ), which is assumed to reflect an individual's learning potential, is in the average range or higher. Although criticisms have been levelled at the use of full-scale IQ as a measure of 'potential', few alternative measures are currently available, and none is in widespread use. With regard to achievement, some systems (including the Irish system) set specific cut-off points such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile. A number of systems also require a 'significant' discrepancy (difference) between an individual's ability (full-scale IQ) and achievement scores. Such approaches have been strongly criticised, often on the grounds that they exclude certain groups of students from accessing services, including students whose achievement or ability scores fall outside specified cut-off points. Regardless of which criteria are used, it seems important that each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia receives a level of provision appropriate to his/her needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Special Education Review Committee. (1993). *Report* (p. 86). Dublin: Stationery Office.

### ***Review of Current Range of Provision and Services***

In its review of current provision, the Task Force adopted the view that the learning difficulties of students with dyslexia, which range along a continuum from mild to severe, should be matched by a range of appropriate provision and services.

The Task Force noted that a range of provision and services is currently available to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including:

- additional support from class and subject teachers;
- supplementary teaching from a learning support (remedial) teacher; and
- special education provision.

Special education provision may involve resource teaching (i.e., the provision of supplementary teaching in the student's own school on a daily basis by a resource teacher), enrolment in a special class for students with specific learning disabilities in a mainstream school, or enrolment in a special school for students with specific learning disabilities. Learning support and resource teaching services have increased in size and scope in recent years, while additional special classes in primary schools have also been established. However, a number of difficulties arise in considering the effectiveness of these provisions:

- no information is available on the numbers of students with dyslexia who are in receipt of learning support or resource teaching;
- information on the effects of learning support and special education provision, including information on how students fare if special provision has been discontinued, is limited;
- no information is available on the relative effects of different forms of special education provision, such as resource teaching, in a student's own school or enrolment in a special class or school;
- no review of the operation or effectiveness of the learning support service in second-level schools had been undertaken.

On the basis of submissions to the Task Force, however, it can be inferred that the system of provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is not functioning at optimal level. Many submissions referred to difficulty in accessing psychological assessments in order to access services, to the misunderstandings about dyslexia held by some class and subject teachers, and to a failure by schools and teachers to identify students' difficulties at an early stage so that early intervention could be provided. Many parents indicated that they had gone to great expense to pay for assessments, tutoring services, and therapies designed to alleviate the effects of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and argued that the state should provide appropriate services without additional cost to parents in terms of time and money. Finally, several parents

commented that they had great difficulty in accessing information about dyslexia and about the provision and services that are available to students with dyslexia.

The Task Force also considered the range of accommodations that are available to students with dyslexia in state examinations, and the effects of changes implemented by the Department of Education and Science over the past year or so, following the publication of a report by an Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations. Of particular concern to persons making submissions to the Task Force was the recently introduced practice of appending explanatory notes to the certificates of students who obtained certain accommodations such as the services of a reader, or access to a tape recorder or word processor. Still others argued that appropriate training in the use of technologies such as tape recorders and word processors should be provided well in advance of the examinations. Others worried that their children's scripts might not receive adequate attention from examiners who are unfamiliar with the difficulties of students with dyslexia.

### ***Rationale Underpinning the Approach of the Task Force***

The Task Force was concerned with the extent to which students with dyslexia are 'categorised' in order to access a level of support appropriate to their needs. The Task Force favours an approach in which the principle of each child having a right to an education appropriate to his or her individual needs (the 'individualised' model) would apply. This section presents a rationale for the approach of the Task Force, which led to the recommendations presented in this report.

The Task Force considered that the individual manifestations of dyslexia are so diverse and the range of need so varied that learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be viewed along a continuum rather than falling into clearly definable categories. ***The Task Force recommends the adoption of a model of provision based on meeting the needs of each student along the continuum of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.*** The Task Force does not feel that it is appropriate to categorise students as the basis for provision. The model which the Task Force proposes is based on the principle of differentiated response, and has a dual purpose. In the first instance, it seeks to identify and support students as early as possible to alleviate potential difficulties later. Secondly, it seeks to provide the most intensive support to those students whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are the most severe.

The members of the Task Force were anxious to ensure that, in so far as is possible, the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be met in their own schools. In the first instance, instructional strategies should be adjusted by the student's class teacher. For some students, progress to a period of intensive learning support teaching will be required. The Task Force broadly endorses the approach to intervention outlined in the *Learning*

*Support Guidelines*,<sup>3</sup> which provides for assessment and programme planning at the individual student level and involves class teachers, learning support teachers and parents working collaboratively to identify and meet agreed learning targets. Should a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia not respond to provision in his/her own classroom, or in a learning support setting after a reasonable period of time, the Task Force proposes a multi-disciplinary review of the child's learning needs, in which the nature and severity of the child's learning difficulties are examined, and the most appropriate form of provision is identified. Such provision may be within the child's own school, or, where this is not possible, because of the need for very specialised support, in another school in the child's community.

The Task Force considered the criteria currently used to identify students with special needs in order to access special educational resources to be problematic. For one thing, some students are not adequately provided for because they fall marginally outside current eligibility thresholds. Other children may be excluded because of difficulty in accessing the form of assessment required by current criteria. The Task Force, while recognising the limitations of intelligence tests as measures of potential, notes the central role afforded to such tests in current national and international definitions of dyslexia. In its view, the outcome of such tests is but one of several factors that should be taken into account in reaching decisions about a student's learning needs. Alternatives to current measures of ability and learning potential should be carefully examined, if and when they are developed.

The Task Force considers individualisation of provision to be an educational imperative and a legal requirement. It considers that there is a need for further debate and ongoing research to advance our thinking on how, in the context of the Irish educational system, the goal of individualisation can be achieved.

The Task Force notes that difficulties may arise in implementing the individualised model. However, it is firmly of the view that it is essential to move as quickly as possible towards implementing such a model.

The change to an individualised system has implications for those charged with delivery within that system and for the availability of resources. For all students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the need for individualised support at the class level in primary schools and at subject level in post-primary schools will be increased. As classroom teachers exercise a key role in addressing and meeting needs, enhanced levels of teacher preparation and of in-career development and training will be required. The recommendations of the Task Force seek to ensure that both the financial and human resources required for an individualised approach will be put in place to maximise the capacity of the system to meet the needs of students equally throughout the state.

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning Support Guidelines*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

### ***Organisation of Recommendations***

In arriving at recommendations for the future development of provision and services for students with dyslexia, the Task Force was aware of plans by the Department of Education and Science to implement some urgently required initiatives in the near future, including the establishment of a National Support Service for Special Education and the provision of inservice training for principal teachers and learning support teachers on the new *Learning Support Guidelines*. These and related developments, including ongoing reviews of preservice teacher education at the primary and post-primary levels and the planned expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), have implications for meeting the needs of all students with learning difficulties, including students whose difficulties arise from dyslexia. In arriving at its own recommendations, the Task Force adopted the perspective that a package of initiatives would need to be implemented if the situation of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is to be improved significantly.

The recommendations of the Task Force may be categorised as referring to:

- System-level issues;
- Preservice teacher education;
- In-career professional development of teachers;
- School/local-level initiatives;
- Classroom-level initiatives;
- Initiatives by other service providers.

### ***Implementation of Recommendations***

In putting forward its recommendations, the Task Force made a distinction between those that should be implemented in the short term (i.e., in the 2001-02 school year), and those that should be implemented in the medium term (i.e., within three years). The Task Force recommends that the implementation of its recommendations should be reviewed in three years' time, and that, at that time, account should be taken of emerging findings and new initiatives in the area of dyslexia.

## **A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO PARENTS**

The work of the Task Force was facilitated to a considerable degree by the volume and relevance of the submissions, oral and written, which it received in response to its appeal. The vast majority of these submissions came from you, the parents, who have first-hand experience of the learning difficulties arising from dyslexia that are experienced by your children. We thank you for your contributions; we have read your comments carefully and we recognise the complex nature of your experiences and your needs. We feel that the following recommendations in our report will help to achieve a more appropriate provision for the distinct educational needs of children with dyslexia.

### **Professional Development of Teachers**

- Preservice teacher education programmes and in-career development courses for serving teachers should pay special attention to identifying and meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [Recommendations 31-38]

### **Psychological Services**

- The number of places for the post-graduate training of educational psychologists should be increased. [R54]
- Educational psychology should be offered as a subject in Colleges of Education. [R33]
- Funding should be provided to schools to enable them to employ approved contract psychologists to expedite assessments. [R55]
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, should provide schools with guidelines for the identification and support of students who may have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R57]

### **Assistive Technology**

- The National Centre for Technology in Education should be provided with resources to advise and support teachers in the use of technology with students whose learning difficulties arise from dyslexia. [R60]
- Grants or tax relief should be given to parents for the purchase of assistive technology where such has been recommended. [R61]

### **Access to Information**

- Advice and information on dyslexia should be readily available in schools to parents and teachers in the form of leaflets and brochures, while a website should also be made available. [R1, R60]

### **Involvement of Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/guardians should be involved in multi-disciplinary teams with teachers and other professionals in ongoing assessment of their child's needs and in the development and review of their child's individual learning programme. [R43, R53]
- Parents should have the right of appeal to an independent forum if they are not satisfied with the provision for their child. [R17]

### **Examinations**

- Applicants for reasonable accommodation in State Examinations should receive early notice of the granting of the accommodation so that appropriate advance training can be given in the use of equipment. [R20]
- The Department of Education and Science should examine a range of accommodations that might be offered to all students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in state examinations, including the provision of test papers with enlarged print, and the option of listening to the examination questions on tape. [R19]

### **Schools**

- Every primary and post-primary school should incorporate into its School Plan a policy for addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and for involving parents in all aspects of its response to these needs. [R39, R40, R41]
- Information should be transferred at the point of transition from primary to post-primary level schooling and contact persons to co-ordinate provision at both levels should be named by schools. [R41]

# CHAPTER 1

## THE CONTEXT OF THE TASK FORCE'S WORK

### 1.1 Introduction

Conscious of the fact that the child is the centre of educational interest and endeavour, and of the needs of children who experience reading difficulties in particular, the Task Force approached its Terms of Reference from the perspective that all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that children with reading difficulties, including dyslexia, can achieve their potential as they progress through the educational system.

#### **Terms of Reference of the Task Force on Dyslexia (Specific Reading Disability)**

Having regard to the responsibility of the State to make adequate educational provision for all children with special needs, including children with Dyslexia (Specific Reading Disability).

Having regard to the distinct educational needs of certain children with Specific Reading Disability.

Having regard to the State's commitment to ensuring that the special educational needs of children with Specific Reading Disability are properly addressed within the education system.

Having regard to the range of special education provision and support services already made available to children with specific reading disability in special schools, special classes attached to ordinary schools and in integrated settings, and

Having regard to the desirability of ensuring that the services made available to children with specific reading disability reflect best international practice.

The task force on specific reading disability will:

- Review the current range of educational provision and support services available to children with specific reading disability in Ireland;
- Assess the adequacy of current educational provision and support services, having regard to the range of special needs which can arise and the need to address such needs either in integrated settings or by way of special dedicated provision;
- Make such recommendations as are considered appropriate for the development or adjustment of existing policy approaches, educational provision and support services, in order to ensure the delivery of an appropriate, effective and efficient education service to children with Specific Reading Disability;
- Make such further recommendations as the Task Force considers appropriate in relation to the above matters.

The urgency of the Task Force's work is underlined by recent reports that point to low levels of literacy among a proportion of primary and post-primary students. In the White Paper, *Charting our Education Future*,<sup>4</sup> the view was expressed that a significant minority of students do not acquire satisfactory levels of literacy or numeracy while at primary school. In the 1998 National Assessment of English Reading in fifth class, 11% of boys and 7% of girls were judged by their teachers to be reading at a third-class level or lower.<sup>5</sup> In an earlier study, it was estimated that between 6.5% and 8.5% of Irish 14-year olds had literacy problems that are likely to impede their educational development and their life chances.<sup>6</sup>

Learning to read and to write is critical to progress in the educational system, to the development of self-esteem and, ultimately, to quality of life and well-being. Individuals who experience difficulties in acquiring literacy skills are very likely to experience difficulties in other aspects of life and learning as a consequence of their literacy problems. These individuals are also at significant risk of failing at school, leaving school early and under-achieving in vocational and occupational areas.

A minority, but nonetheless a significant proportion of students who experience difficulties in learning to read, spell or write are those with specific difficulties in one or more of the these areas. Such difficulties may arise from dyslexia.<sup>7</sup> The difficulties experienced by students with dyslexia may be described as learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

The difficulties experienced by students with dyslexia may be described as learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

The term 'specific learning difficulties' is preferred over 'specific learning disabilities' in this report. However, the term 'specific learning disabilities' is used where this term is associated with existing provision – for example, special schools or classes for students with specific learning disabilities.

While the Task Force recognised that some students may have specific learning difficulties in one or more aspects of mathematics, such difficulties and strategies for addressing them were not examined by the Task Force.

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<sup>4</sup> Ireland.(1995). *Charting Our Education Future. White Paper on Education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>5</sup> Cosgrove, J., Kellaghan, T., Forde, P., & Morgan, M. (2000). *The 1998 National assessment of English Reading*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, M., & Morgan, M. (1994). Reading Literacy in Irish Schools: A Comparative Analysis. *Irish Journal of Education*, 28, 3-101.

<sup>7</sup> A definition of dyslexia is given in Chapter 3 of this report.

In the remainder of this chapter, the main principles underpinning the work of the Task Force are outlined, and legal and policy contexts relevant to its work are summarised.

## 1.2. Principles Guiding the Work of the Task Force

Several recent policy documents have put forward principles that are relevant to the work of the Task Force, including the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee* (SERC) and the White Paper on Education, *Charting Our Education Future*. The Task Force identified the following principles as being particularly relevant for its own work, and, more generally, for meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia:

- ***A Whole-School, Multi-Disciplinary Approach*** – A whole-school approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be planned and implemented in all schools, and should involve the Board of Management, teachers, parents and students.
- ***Key Involvement of Class/Subject Teachers*** – Class and subject teachers should be centrally involved in identifying possible learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and in addressing the needs of students identified as having learning difficulties.
- ***Early and Graduated Intervention*** – Where possible, learning difficulties should be identified in the first years of schooling, and appropriate adjustments based on need should be made.
- ***A Continuum of Support and Services*** – A continuum of support and services should be available to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia matched to the severity and persistence of their learning difficulties.
- ***A Focus on Individual Learning Needs*** – Programme planning and provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should focus on individual learning needs.
- ***Accountability and Transparency*** – Procedures within the educational system for addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, should be clearly stated, and the persons responsible for implementing such procedures should be identified.
- ***Inclusiveness*** – Where possible, the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, should be met in such a way that they enjoy the same educational experiences as other students without such needs
- ***Parent Involvement***– Parents/guardians should be centrally involved in making decisions pertaining to their child’s learning needs, and in addressing those needs.
- ***A System-Wide Approach*** – Provision for responding to the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, should be made at all levels within the education system.

- **Equity and Non-Discrimination** – The principles of equity and non-discrimination should be adhered to in addressing the needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.3 Legal Contexts

The Constitution of Ireland (Article 42) enshrines the right of all children to receive at least a minimum education and places the duty on the State to ensure that that right is respected, and generally to provide for free primary education. This right has most recently been given expression within the Education Act (1998).

The Education Act 1998 brings a new perspective to the manner in which the right to education is to be honoured. Rather than nurturing a dependency on the state, it emphasises the responsibility of the individual school board in making provision for those attending the school. For example, it is stated that the board is required to . . .

use the resources provided to the school from monies provided by the Oireachtas to make reasonable provision and accommodation for students with disabilities or other special educational needs. (Education Act 1998 Section 15 (2)(g))

It is also stated that each board shall . . .

publish . . . the policy of the school concerning . . . admission to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs and ensure that as regards that policy principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected. . . (Section 15(2)(d)).

The Education Act places an onus on schools to make reasonable provision and accommodation for students with disabilities or other special educational needs.

One of the objectives of the Education Act, which is pertinent to the type of collaborative effort that is essential in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia on an ongoing basis, is the intention...

to promote effective liaison and consultation between schools and centres for education, patrons, teachers, parents, the communities served by schools, local authorities, health boards, persons or groups of persons who have a special interest in, or experience of, the education of students with special educational needs and the Minister. (Section 6 (g)).

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<sup>8</sup>These principles are specified in the Equal Status Act 2000 and in Article 6A of the Amsterdam Treaty (Council of Ministers of the European Community, 1997).

The school plan is a key element in the delivery of an appropriate education to all students. Section 21 (2) of the Act highlights the extent to which the plan must include measures designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The school plan is a key element in the delivery of an appropriate education to all students.

In its deliberations and conclusions, the Task Force was influenced by the intentions and commitments set out in the Education Act and has sought to present recommendations which reflect the spirit of the Act, including the development of appropriate learning programmes for students with learning disabilities.

In addition to the framework provided by the Education Act, Section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000 places an obligation on all educational institutions, from pre-school to higher education, to refrain from discrimination in their admissions procedures and in their treatment of students. It is, for example, pointed out that discrimination on the grounds of disability can occur if there is a failure to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability.

The Task Force also noted the recent court judgements referring to students with special educational needs. For example, in the Sinnott case, the High Court reaffirmed the state's obligation to provide an appropriate primary education for all children, including those with disabilities. In the judgement, Mr Justice Barr noted that 'there is an urgent requirement for an integrated departmental approach to the fulfilment of the constitutional obligations of the State to disabled sections of society...'. The judgement, which dealt primarily with the needs of an adult with autism, and which is being appealed by the Department of Education and Science, may have implications for meeting the needs of students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

#### **1.4 Policy Contexts**

The Task Force recognised that several recent policy-driven initiatives – both implemented and proposed – have implications for the development of services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. These initiatives include:

- The launch in September 1999 of a revised Primary School Curriculum, the provision of inservice support to teachers in relation to that curriculum, and the phased implementation of the curriculum in schools;
- The establishment in September 1999 of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) as a dedicated agency of the Department of

Education and Science. The main aim of NEPS is to assist in facilitating all students to develop their potential and to maximise the benefits of their educational and other experiences, having particular regard for those with special educational needs.

- The publication in February 2000 of the Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations, *Arrangements for The Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations*,<sup>9</sup> and the implementation of elements of that report through circulars issued by the Department of Education and Science.<sup>10</sup>
- The launch in June 2000 of the National Disability Authority (NDA). The Authority is charged with advising the government on the co-ordination and development of policy, monitoring of standards and the impact of services for persons with disabilities
- The publication by the Department of Education and Science in August 2000 of new *Learning Support Guidelines* for primary schools, which provide for the development of structures in schools to support children with learning difficulties; it is expected that principal teachers and learning support teachers will receive inservice training on the implementation of the *Guidelines* in the 2001-2002 school year.
- The ongoing work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which advises the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and syllabuses for all students, including those with disabilities. The NCCA is currently examining curricular provision for students with general learning disabilities.<sup>11</sup>
- The announcement by the Minister for Education and Science in January 2000 that a National Support Service for Special Education would be developed.<sup>12</sup>
- Ongoing work, within the Department of Education and Science, on the development of a structure for the organisation of special education services, including proposals to appoint special needs organisers who would operate out of regional centres.
- Major reviews of the preservice education programmes for primary and post-primary teachers due for completion shortly.

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<sup>9</sup> Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations. (2000). *Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations*. Dublin:

<sup>10</sup> Circulars 11/2000 and S70/2000

<sup>11</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2000). *Special Education Needs: Curriculum Issues. A Discussion Document*. Dublin: Author.

<sup>12</sup> Press Release. January 26, 2000. Announcement of Comprehensive Initiative for Assessment and Delivery of Special Needs Education.

## 1.5

This report is divided into

Chapter 2 summarises the submissions made to the Task Force by organisations, educational institutions and individuals. Chapter 3 provides an overview of dyslexia and systems in other countries that have attempted to define dyslexia and address the needs of students with dyslexia.

Chapter 4 considers the adequacy of existing provision for students with dyslexia, including

identifying students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, or students who may be at risk of developing such difficulties. Chapter 5 identifies the variety of services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Chapter 6 addresses the Task Force's short-term and medium-term recommendations for improving provision and services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

Chapter 7 sets out the Task Force's short-term and medium-term recommendations for improving provision and services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Chapter 8 sets out the Task Force's recommendations for the following: (A) a list of the areas of educational disadvantage; (B) indicators of dyslexia or other possible learning difficulties; (C) a schedule of the Task Force's meetings; (D) a description of the areas of educational disadvantage; (E) a description of provision by the Task Force; and (F) a list of individuals, educational

## CHAPTER 2

### SUBMISSIONS TO THE TASK FORCE

#### 2.1 Introduction

At its first meeting, the Task Force decided to engage in a process of public consultation to ascertain the views and the recommendations of the public at large and of key groups and organisations relating to the matter of dyslexia. An advertisement was placed in the national newspapers setting out the terms of reference of the Task Force and inviting written submissions.

As a follow up to this it was decided to write to key groups and organisations, enclosing a copy of the advertisement with a view to eliciting responses/submissions. The following groups and organisations were contacted: Vocational Education Committees (33), Education Centres (23), Education Co-ordinators in Partnership Companies (38), National Parents' Councils (2), National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Community Workshops (FÁS).

As a result of this consultation process, a total of 399 written submissions were received (See Appendix G). These came from a range of sources, including parents, students, adults with dyslexia, principal teachers, class teachers, learning-support teachers, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, schools, colleges, education centres, associations and organisations.

The Task Force recognised that some individuals with dyslexia might experience problems in dealing with a written advertisement in the newspapers and in formulating a written response. To obtain the views of this group, which, it was felt, would be of particular value and relevance to the work of the Task Force, a short advertisement was carried on Radio 1 for a period of seven days and free-phone access to a comment line was put in place for a period of eleven days to receive oral comments and responses. Researchers on programmes on Radio 1 and Radio 2 (FM) which focus on interaction with the general public ('chat shows') were contacted with a view to alerting the listening public to the fact that a comment line with the free phone access had been set up. A total of 896 submissions were made. A feature of many of the oral submissions was a direct request for information or assistance, with many persons leaving contact phone numbers or addresses.

The many substantial and considered submissions which were received afford a particular perspective on education and dyslexia in Ireland. A feature of many was the sense of anger and frustration felt by parents and indeed students in attempting to have their needs met. All of these submissions were considered

by the Task Force during its deliberations and were taken into account when recommendations were being formulated.

The content of the submissions is summarised below, while reference to them is made throughout the report. Because of variation in the numbers of submissions made by various groups (parents provided the most), the summary provides a broad indication of the thrust of the submissions rather than a quantification of the number of submissions making a particular point.

## **2.2 Summary of Submissions**

**2.2.1 Defining Dyslexia.** The vast majority of submissions used the term 'dyslexia' rather than specific reading difficulty or specific learning disability. Many submissions stated that dyslexia should be clearly defined. Concern was frequently expressed about the use of the term 'specific reading disability' in the Task Force's Terms of Reference, which appeared in newspaper advertisements. In some submissions, the view was expressed that the term 'dyslexia' is more user-friendly and acceptable. The application of exclusionary criteria (for example, the requirement that full-scale IQ in the average range) to identify children with dyslexia who have special education needs was criticised in several submissions.

**2.2.2 Early Recognition of Dyslexia.** Almost all submissions highlighted the importance and value of early recognition of dyslexia. Among the approaches suggested to facilitate this were: raising the awareness of teachers and of the general public about dyslexia, providing additional support to students with a history of risk factors, and administering screening tests for dyslexia on a routine basis. Many submissions stressed the importance of early recognition coupled with intervention and argued that this combination would lead to improved learning outcomes for many children.

**2.2.3 Psychological Assessments.** Many submissions highlighted difficulties in arranging psychological assessments. However, a few welcomed the creation of the National Educational Psychological Service and the expansion in the number of psychologists in the system. In many of the submissions from parents, anger was expressed at having to pay for the psychological assessments because of long waiting lists. Several submissions sought more consultation with teachers and parents by psychologists. It was argued that psychological reports should provide clear and precise recommendations.

A small number of submissions focused specifically on the assessment of minority groups, including travellers, and called for the use of culturally appropriate tests in making decisions about educational needs. The difficulties

that arise in assessing the ability and achievements of students whose first language is Irish were also mentioned.

**2.2.4 Intervention.** Almost all submissions advocated prompt and appropriate intervention. There was a preference for mainstream education with 'dyslexia-friendly' teaching methods and, where necessary, appropriate support teaching. Many submissions stated that support teaching should be integrated with the general curriculum, and a few stated that there should be more maths support teaching. Many expressed concern at the delay between recognition of difficulties and intervention, while lack of clear information about how to access learning support was also raised. A small number of submissions stressed the need for the development of individual learning programmes for students with dyslexia that would involve teachers, parents and other professionals.

A small number of submissions called for an expansion in the number of special classes for students with specific learning disabilities. A few called for the establishment of more special schools for children experiencing such difficulties.

**2.2.5 Cost factors in addressing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.** Almost all submissions from parents and a number from other groups highlighted the financial costs associated with dyslexia. Parents referred to the cost of accessing assessments, providing extra tuition, acquiring assistive technology, and providing additional (non-educational) therapies. Several submissions suggested that grants, tax relief or a system of direct payments to parents should be introduced to offset these costs.

**2.2.6 Post-primary schooling.** Many submissions highlighted difficulties encountered by parents and their children during post-primary schooling. Among the difficulties were sub-optimal transfer of information from primary to post-primary schools and from year to year at post-primary level, inappropriate streaming, limited subject choices, reduced support teaching, lack of special reading units, and limited ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) support.

**2.2.7 Provision of reasonable accommodations in state examinations.** Many submissions disagreed with the recent changes to the accommodations for students with dyslexia in state examinations. In particular, the practice of adding an explanatory note to the certificates of students whose scripts were not assessed for spelling and/or grammar was criticised. Some submissions expressed the concern that, since the 'flagging' of scripts of students with dyslexia had been discontinued, scripts might not be forwarded by assistant examiners to their supervising examiners for special consideration. Some submissions pointed to the need for training in their own schools for students qualifying for special arrangements, including those assigned a scribe, word processor or tape recorder. Some requested speedier notification of granting of

special arrangements. Many requested clearer guidelines on eligibility for special arrangements, and clearer application procedures.

**2.2.8 Exemption from the study of Irish for students with dyslexia.** Some submissions called for clearer guidelines on eligibility for exemption from the study of Irish, and on the procedures for gaining an exemption. Several suggested that the free periods resulting from receipt of an exemption could be used more productively. Still others called for the provision of a broad, non-exam based course in Irish for students with dyslexia who could not study the examination syllabi.

**2.2.9 Provision for students with dyslexia whose first language is Irish.** A small number of submissions stated that a modified Irish programme should be made available for those with dyslexia. A few submissions suggested that those receiving mainstream instruction in Irish, especially native speakers, should receive support teaching in Irish.

**2.2.10 Preservice teacher education and in-career development.** Most submissions identified the need for more training in the recognition of dyslexia, and in the provision of support to students with dyslexia. Class and subject teachers, learning support teachers and resource teachers were all identified as needing more in-career development. Pre-service, induction and in-service models were suggested. A number of colleges of education provided information on current modules in the recognition and management of dyslexia with most indicating that they were allocating increased time to these topics.

In a few cases, parents complimented individual teachers on their understanding in dealing with their child's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

**2.2.11 Students with dyslexia attending private schools.** A few submissions highlighted the lack of learning support and resource teaching in private schools.

**2.2.12 Educational disadvantage.** Some submissions highlighted the difficulties of students with dyslexia who attend schools in disadvantaged areas. It was pointed out that these students often experience long delays in accessing psychological assessments, and, because of their inability to pay, cannot afford faster private assessments. In several submissions, it was argued that there is a larger proportion of students with special needs in such schools, and that due consideration should be given to this in determining the number of support teachers that are allocated to such schools. It was also argued that in larger schools serving disadvantaged areas, where there may be several special needs and learning support teachers, there may be a need for an additional post to co-ordinate these resources effectively.

**2.2.13 Adults with dyslexia.** Several submissions pointed out that adults were excluded from the Task Force's terms of reference. A number of submissions

suggested that adults with dyslexia, particularly those in prison and those experiencing long-term unemployment, need intensive literacy programmes.

**2.2.14 Localisation of special education services.** Many submissions proposed local provision of special education and learning support services. Some suggested appointing special needs organisers to develop local services, to support teachers, to provide training, to conduct school visits, to provide advice to schools, and to implement various programmes (e.g., awareness, induction, distance education, research).

**2.2.15 Co-ordination of services.** Many submissions stated that services for students with dyslexia should be better co-ordinated. It was stated that class/subject teachers, support teachers, parents and students should have regular meetings to review progress and evaluate current needs. A team approach involving the whole school and an educational psychologist was advocated.

**2.2.16 Role of parents.** Parents made most of the submissions. Many indicated that they felt angry, frustrated and annoyed at many levels. They felt their concerns were not adequately addressed. They wanted more consultation with teachers, more information, guidance (e.g., on homework), more explanation of procedures, especially regarding access to criteria and support services, accommodations in exams, and language exemptions. They frequently expressed frustration at the delay in accessing psychological assessments and felt that the cost of assessments and extra tuition should be borne by the state.

**2.2.17 Value of additional therapies.** Many submissions mentioned non-educational methods of managing dyslexia, and many requested funding for these therapies. Some pointed out that their children availed of these therapies in addition to more conventional educational therapies and that benefits were apparent. Some called on the Department of Education and Science to evaluate alternative therapies.

**2.2.18 Information and communication technologies.** Many submissions stated that students with dyslexia should have greater access to computers and appropriate software, books on tape, and tape recorders, including personalised recorders. Many of the submissions from support teachers stated that the current level of funding was insufficient to provide these facilities.

**2.2.19 Provision for students with dyslexia in third-level institutions.** A few submissions outlined the current provision for students with dyslexia in various institutions and highlighted large variations in service between institutions.

**2.2.20 Implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.** A large proportion of submissions stated that a review body should be set up to monitor implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Submissions to the Task Force covered a broad range of topics and concerns. Many of the submissions focused on difficulties in accessing services and provisions that are currently available, including psychological assessments. Others focused on recent changes to the accommodations that are available for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in state examinations, and disagreed with, or at least questioned, some of these changes. In particular, the practice of adding an explanatory note to the certificates of students whose scripts were not scored for specific aspects of a subject (for example, spelling and grammar) was strongly criticised. In addition to these matters, the lack of knowledge among class teachers, subject teachers and learning-support teachers about dyslexia, and the consequent lack of an appropriate response on the part of schools was a particular concern. It is significant that relatively few submissions called for a significant increase in special education provision for students with dyslexia. Rather, concerns were raised about the inappropriate ways in which schools respond to students' needs.

While a majority of submissions were negative or critical, some were positive. Among these were reports on work of volunteer organisations outside of the school system, the effects of alternative (non-educational) therapies, the implementation of procedures to support students with specific learning difficulties in third-level institutions, and the benefits of information and communication technologies to some students with dyslexia.

## CHAPTER 3

### NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON DYSLEXIA

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for later chapters in the report in which current provision for students with dyslexia in Ireland is examined and proposals are put forward for meeting their needs. The current chapter is divided into five parts:

- (i) A consideration of the definition of dyslexia used by the Department of Education and Science, and an overview of the main types of provision that are available to students with dyslexia;
- (ii) A comparison of the definitions of dyslexia employed in three other educational systems (the United States, Northern Ireland, and England and Wales) and an overview of the procedures and criteria used to match students to services;
- (iii) A consideration of the criticisms aimed at current system-level definitions and associated identification criteria;
- (iv) An overview of recent research findings on information-processing difficulties of students with dyslexia.
- (v) A definition of dyslexia proposed by the Task Force and a consideration of main characteristics of dyslexia.

#### ***Dyslexia – Some Dictionary Perspectives***

The Greek roots of the word 'dyslexia' are 'dus' – a prefix meaning hard, bad, or unlucky – and 'lexis' – meaning either speech or a single word or phrase.<sup>13</sup> According to one authority, 'the etymology of the term 'dyslexia' expresses admirably a difficulty – not in reading – but in the use of words, how they are identified, what they signify, how they are handled in combination, how they are pronounced and how they are spelled'.<sup>14</sup>

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines dyslexia as 'a developmental disorder, marked by extreme difficulty in reading or in understanding written words, or word-blindness'.<sup>15</sup>

The *Literacy Dictionary* describes dyslexia as 'a developmental reading disability, presumably congenital and perhaps hereditary in nature, that may vary from mild to severe. . . Dyslexics frequently have difficulty in spelling and in acquiring a second language, suggesting that dyslexia is a part of a broad type of language disability'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. (1925). *A Greek-English Lexicon*. London: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Critchley, M. (1981). *Dyslexia – an Overview*. In G. Th. Pavlidis, and T.R.Miles (Eds). *Dyslexia Research and Its Applications to Education*. Chichester: Wile.

<sup>15</sup> *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles*. (1999). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>16</sup> Harris, T.L. and Hodges, R.E. (Eds). (1995). *The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

There are many definitions of, and perspectives on, dyslexia in the literature. These generally serve one of three purposes:

- (i) to enable researchers to identify and describe individuals who are being investigated;
- (ii) to enable teachers and parents to recognise children who experience, or are at risk of developing, learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, so that those difficulties can be addressed;
- (iii) to enable educational systems to identify students whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are so severe that special education provision is necessary

The discussion of definitions in this chapter focuses on the second and third of these purposes.

### **3.2 Dyslexia – An Irish Perspective**

Since 1963, the Department of Education and Science has sanctioned learning support (remedial) posts in schools, with the objective of enabling students to bridge the gap between achievement and potential.<sup>17</sup> Since 1975, it has put in place a range of supports for students with specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia) which include special schools and special classes in ordinary schools. In general, official definitions of dyslexia and criteria for its identification have been concerned with addressing the needs of students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, who may need special educational provision. In 1993, the definition of specific learning disability, and the provision made for students with such a disability, were reviewed by the Special Education Review Committee (SERC), which adopted the term 'specific learning disability' in preference to 'dyslexia'. According to the SERC Report, the term 'specific learning disability' is used to describe:

impairments in specific areas such as reading, writing and arithmetical notation, the primary cause of which is not attributable to assessed ability being below the average range, to defective sight or hearing, emotional factors, a physical condition or to any extrinsic adverse circumstance

With regard to the identification of specific learning disability, the SERC Report recommended that

- assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence should place general intellectual ability in the average or above average range (i.e., a threshold requirement);

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Department of Education. (1988). *Guidelines on Remedial Education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

- performance in basic skills in relation to objective criteria, such as standardised tests, [should be] at a very low level. It would be expected that some 2% of the overall pupil population would be found in this category (i.e., a discrepancy requirement).

The SERC Report made a number of additional recommendations relating to provision for students with specific learning disabilities, including the following:

- Recognition of existing special schools for pupils with specific learning disabilities should be continued and their development as resource centres, as part of the educational provision for such children, should be reflected in their staffing and funding levels.
- Additional teaching support for pupils with specific learning disabilities in the Infant Classes and Classes I and II at primary level, should be provided in their own schools by support teachers (i.e., remedial (learning support), resource, or visiting teachers, as applicable).
- Special provision for pupils with specific disabilities from Classes III to IV in primary schools; a pupil-teacher appointment ratio of 11:1 should apply to support-teacher posts to be sanctioned in such schools and pupils with specific learning disabilities should participate in ordinary classes as appropriate in each case.
- Transfer of a pupil with specific learning disabilities to a designated ordinary school<sup>18</sup> should be on a temporary whole-time basis, and not for more than two years as a general rule.
- Special provision for pupils with specific learning disabilities who are enrolled in ordinary classes III to VI in primary schools, which are not designated schools, should be made by means of support teachers.
- Teachers with experience in teaching pupils with specific learning disabilities should be appointed, on a pilot basis, to provide a support service as may be necessary for pupils.
- Special provision for post-primary pupils with specific learning disabilities should be made within the ordinary school system with assistance from a support teacher.

The SERC definition and assessment criteria have, in recent years, provided a basis for identifying students with specific learning disabilities, while the SERC recommendations on provision have influenced the development of services.

Primary-level students with specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia) who meet specified criteria in relation to achievement, ability, and class level, are entitled to special education provision and may:

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<sup>18</sup> i.e., a school with a special class for students with specific learning disabilities

- (i) continue to attend their own school and receive resource teaching support (usually one-to-one teaching from a special education teacher) for up to 2.5 hours per week in addition to extra support from the class teacher;<sup>19</sup>
- (ii) transfer to a special class for students with specific learning disabilities in a designated ordinary school for a period of not more than two years;
- (iii) transfer to a special school for students with specific learning disabilities for a period of not more than two years.

Primary-level students with specific learning disabilities who do not meet eligibility criteria for special education services may be provided with additional support in their own school by their class teacher or by a learning support teacher.

Unlike primary level, provision of resource teaching at post-primary level for students with specific learning disabilities is not governed by circular. Students with specific learning disabilities who received support at primary level are entitled to receive such support at post-primary level, if they request it, while others may have to undergo assessment to establish eligibility. Support is typically provided in the student's own school by a resource teacher or by a learning support teacher, though relatively little information is available on the nature and quality of such support. Some post-primary students with specific learning disabilities may qualify for accommodations in state examinations, and may be exempted from the study of Irish. The types of provision and the accommodations that are available to primary and post-primary students, and the current criteria for eligibility, are considered in detail in Chapter 4, where the views of organisations and individuals who made submissions to the Task Force on these matters are also considered. First, however, definitions of dyslexia used in other educational systems, and procedures used to identify students with dyslexia who may have special educational needs are considered.

### **3.3 Dyslexia in Other Educational Systems**

Other educational systems have, like Ireland, defined dyslexia and grappled with the issue of identifying the most appropriate educational provision for students. In this section, definition and identification are reviewed in three systems: the United States, Northern Ireland, and England and Wales.

#### ***The United States***<sup>20</sup>

In the United States, the term 'specific learning disability' includes dyslexia. The definition that has been adopted by the vast majority of U.S. states is the legal definition enshrined in Individuals with Disabilities (IDEA) Education Act 1997, which states that:

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<sup>19</sup> Resource teachers are appointed to schools on an ex-quota basis in order to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs arising from disabilities (including dyslexia), who are fully integrated into mainstream schools.

<sup>20</sup> The content of this section is based on a paper, *Learning Disabilities, A US Perspective*, which was delivered to the Task Force by Daniel Hallahan, University of Virginia on October 2000.

the term 'specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage<sup>21</sup>

The IDEA definition establishes the term 'specific learning disability' as an umbrella term that distinguishes the population of persons with such a disability from other populations that experience learning difficulties for other reasons.

In the United States, the main steps for identifying a specific learning disability and establishing a need for special education are:

- (i) referral for psychological assessment, which is usually initiated by the class/subject teacher, and considered by a 'Child Study Team';
- (ii) assessment and identification of a specific learning disability;
- (iii) development of an individualised education plan;
- (iv) determination of the placement taking into consideration the concept of least restrictive environment;
- (v) at least yearly follow-up of the student's progress in meeting the goals of the individualised education plan.

Assessment, which is governed by the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997, involves a multi-disciplinary team in collecting relevant information using standardised achievement and intelligence tests, teacher checklists, and behavioural observations. The multi-disciplinary team, along with the student's parents, meets to review assessment results and to identify whether a disability is present, and determines if the student needs and is eligible for special education services. If a disability is identified and special education services are needed, a second meeting is called to develop an individualised education plan for the child. This meeting involves the student's parents, a special education teacher, a class teacher (if placement in an ordinary classroom is suggested), a representative of the local education authority who is capable of delivering and supervising special education instruction, and, where relevant, other professionals such as a school psychologist, speech and language pathologist or audiologist. The plan outlines a programme of intervention designed to meet the child's needs.

Although not legally required do so, the majority of US states have adopted a discrepancy criterion as part of their identification process. The determination that

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<sup>21</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Amendments of 1997, Sec. 602(26), p. 13).

a child has a specific learning disability may be based on a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement in one or more areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation or mathematical reasoning. The practice of using an ability-achievement discrepancy in identifying a specific learning disability has been criticised in the research literature (see Section 3.4 below), and alternative assessment approaches have been proposed. However, many US states that had set aside discrepancy criteria in the past have reverted to using such criteria.<sup>22</sup>

Since 1977, the U.S. federal government has required all states to track the numbers of students served in each of several special needs categories. Between 1976-77 and 1997-98, the percentage of students with specific learning disabilities increased from 23% to 51% of all students identified as disabled. For 1997-98, 5.58% of students between the ages of 6 and 17 were identified as learning disabled. Prevalence rates between U.S. states in that year varied widely, ranging from 3.24% in Kentucky to 9.27% in Rhode Island. At least 20% of American students with specific learning disabilities also meet the criteria for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

In recent years, there has been a trend towards more inclusionary placements for students with learning disabilities in American schools. Whereas in 1992-93, the most common placement was in the resource room, by 1996-97, it was the regular classroom. Co-operative teaching, which involves general education and special education teachers working as a team, is a widely accepted model. The form that such teaching takes varies considerably. At post-primary level, for example, the general education teacher (subject teacher) takes the lead in academic instruction, and the special education teacher concentrates on supporting the student with, for example, study skills and the organisation of assignments and homework. At primary level, class and special education teachers may jointly plan lessons, and take turns delivering instruction, though relatively little evidence is available to support the efficacy of such practices. Students with a learning disability in the U.S. who meet eligibility criteria for special education services receive an individualised educational programme that guarantees that they will receive the services they need.

### ***Northern Ireland***

Legislation in Northern Ireland allows for the identification of dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty. Under Article 3 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, a child has special education needs if he/she has a learning difficulty that calls for special education provision to be made. Under the Order, Education and Library Boards are responsible for identifying, assessing and making statements of special educational needs (in appropriate cases) for children living within their areas. They do so within the context of the Special Needs Code of Practice,

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<sup>22</sup> Mercer, C.D., Jordan, LA, Allsop, D.H., & Mercer, A.R. (1996). Learning disabilities definitions and criteria used by state education departments. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 19, 217-232.

which is provided for in law and circumscribes how all schools must approach the identification of any child's special needs, and how these needs will be assessed and addressed. The Code of Practice defines specific learning difficulties/dyslexia as follows:

Some children may have significant difficulties in reading, writing, spelling and manipulating numbers, which are not typical of their general level of performance, especially in other areas of the curriculum. They may gain some skills in some subjects quickly, and demonstrate a high level of ability orally, yet may encounter sustained difficulty in gaining literacy or numeracy skills. Such children can become severely frustrated and may also have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.<sup>23</sup>

The Code sets out a five-stage approach to assessment and identification. Where possible, schools and teachers attempt to address a student's difficulty, through the provision of appropriate services, before Stages 4 and 5 are reached. The stages of the code can be summarised as follows:

- Stage 1: The class teacher identifies a child with a learning problem, and adjusts and differentiates the work in order to help the child overcome his/her difficulties. If progress remains unsatisfactory. . . .
- Stage 2: The class teacher involves the school's Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), one of the school's teachers with designated special responsibilities. The SENCO places the child's name on the school's Special Education Needs Register and, together with the class teacher, devises an educational programme tailored for the child, with targets and review points, and discusses the child's difficulties with parents, both to engage their support and for any useful background insights they can provide. If progress is insufficient . . . .
- Stage 3: The school begins to consider outside help to meet the child's needs. This will usually take the form of advice from the educational psychologist or peripatetic/outreach teacher, but other professionals, such as an officer of the Educational Welfare Service, social worker, a general practitioner or a member of the Board's Behaviour Support Team, may also contribute. If progress is still insufficient . . . .
- Stage 4: Statutory Assessment. The Board carries out a formal, statutory assessment of the child's special educational needs. This involves collecting educational, medical, psychological and any other

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<sup>23</sup> Education(Northern Ireland) Order 1996. *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (p.71). Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

relevant advice, and allowing parents the opportunity to express an opinion on their child's education. On the basis of advice received and parental representations, the Board may decide that the child requires a statement of special educational needs, in which case a draft statement is given to the parents for comment and they are asked to name a school for their child to attend. Alternatively, the Board may decide that the child does not require a statement. If a statement is drawn up. . .

Stage 5: Proposals in the statement are implemented. The statement may recommend placement in a named mainstream school, a special school (in which the student's predominant difficulty might be addressed) or a special unit in a mainstream school.

There is variation between the five Education and Library Boards (regional educational authorities) in Northern Ireland concerning the criteria that are applied in identifying specific learning difficulties, and accessing special educational services. One Board requires a full-scale IQ score of 95 or higher, and a 'significant' IQ-achievement discrepancy at the .05 level. Another requires that the student has had literacy support services at Stage 3 in the Code, that the student falls within the bottom 2% on reading accuracy, and that he/she has a reading age of less than 8 years. Still another requires a full-scale IQ score of 90 or higher, and a discrepancy between intelligence and achievement that is 'reliable' at the .02 level. A Regional Strategy Group (an inter-Board special education group, comprising the Boards' statementing officers and principal educational psychologists) has recently been set up to address variation in criteria and to establish a common strategy across Boards.

If parents disagree with the Board's final decision, or if no decision is made, they have the right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, which has the powers to make, amend, or cease to maintain statements.

### **England and Wales**

The procedures for identifying specific learning difficulties in England and Wales are similar to those in Northern Ireland. A *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*<sup>24</sup> was issued in 1994, and therefore preceded the Education (NI) Order 1996. The Code includes a definition of specific learning difficulties/dyslexia that is similar to the definition currently in use in Northern Ireland, and also sets out a staged model of identification.

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<sup>24</sup> Department for Education and Employment. (1994). *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*. London: Author.

The Code of Practice document specifies the range of evidence which Local Education Authorities (LEAs) should seek when deciding on whether or not a statutory assessment is warranted. LEAs are advised to seek clear, recorded evidence of the child's scholastic achievement along the following lines:

- Are there extreme discrepancies between attainment in different core subjects of the National Curriculum or within one core subject (e.g., English)?
- Are expectations of the child, as indicated by a consensus among those who have taught or closely observed him or her, supported, where appropriate, by standardised tests of cognitive ability or oral comprehension, which are significantly above his or her attainments?
- Is there clear, recorded evidence of clumsiness; significant difficulties of sequencing or visual perception; deficiencies of working memory; or significant delays in language functioning?
- Is there evidence of problems sometimes associated with specific learning difficulties, such as severe emotional and behavioural difficulties as indicated by clear, recorded examples of withdrawn or disruptive behaviour, an inability to concentrate, or signs that the child experiences considerable frustration or distress in relation to his/her learning difficulties?

The LEA is advised to 'consider very seriously' the case for statutory assessment where the balance of evidence presented to and assessed by the LEA suggests that the child's learning difficulties:

- are significant and complex;
- have not responded to relevant and purposeful measures taken by the school and external specialist;
- may call for special educational provision that the school cannot reasonably provide within the resources normally available to mainstream schools in the area.

As in Northern Ireland, parents can appeal the LEA's decisions regarding their child's learning needs.

### ***Conclusion***

There is considerable variation between and within educational systems on such matters as the definition of specific learning disabilities/difficulties in general, and dyslexia in particular, the identification and assessment of students who may have specific learning disabilities, and the criteria used in determining the nature and level of provision. Nevertheless, some broad commonalities can be observed:

- Definitions and criteria stipulate that ability must be in the average range or above.

- Criteria for access to special education services often call for a large or 'statistically significant' discrepancy between general ability and achievement in one or more key curriculum areas.
- Students are excluded from receiving special education services designed for those with specific learning disabilities if their difficulties are due to other primary emotional, behavioural or socio-economic problems, sensory impairments or intellectual disabilities.
- Staged processes of assessment that allow schools to address a student's learning difficulties before they become serious are often implemented.
- Parents are involved in key stages in the decision-making process and often have a right to question or appeal decisions.
- Special education provision is made for students with the most serious difficulties, often within a mainstream setting.
- Parents may lodge a formal appeal if they disagree with an educational authority's response to their child's learning needs.

### **3.4 Criticisms of Definitions and Identification Criteria**

For the past decade at least, there have been strong criticisms of definitions of specific learning disability (including dyslexia) employed in educational practice, and of criteria used to determine severity and to regulate access to special education services and other provision. Such criticisms have drawn attention to:

- The use of exclusionary criteria to define specific learning disability; for example, some definitions exclude students on the basis that cultural differences or economic disadvantage contribute to their learning difficulties;
- The failure of some definitions to point to the causes of specific learning disability; some definitions may be more useful in pointing to what a specific learning disability is not rather than what it is;
- The use of full-scale IQ scores to indicate potential in reading. It is argued that other measures such as listening comprehension are better predictors of reading achievement.<sup>25</sup>
- The requirement of a large ability-achievement discrepancy. Statistical problems may arise in computing discrepancies between scores derived from two tests that correlate strongly with each other, such as IQ and reading achievement.

The role of IQ scores in the assessment of specific learning disabilities/dyslexia is particularly controversial. Several studies have failed to find differences between 'dyslexic' students (i.e., those with a statistically significant IQ-reading achievement discrepancy) and other poor readers (those with low reading achievement but no discrepancy) on measures of reading, spelling, phonological

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<sup>25</sup> Stanovich, K.E. (1991). The theoretical and practical consequences of discrepancy definitions of dyslexia. In M. Snowling and M. Thompson (Eds.), *Dyslexia; Integrating theory and practice*. London: Whurr.

processing, and language and memory skills.<sup>26</sup> In particular, it has been found that the closer a cognitive process is to reading, the less likely it is that differences between readers with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and other poor readers will emerge.

The role of full-scale IQ scores in the identification of specific learning difficulties/dyslexia is particularly controversial.

It has been argued in a recent report of the British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology<sup>27</sup> that dyslexia cannot be identified on the basis of an obtained difference between intellectual ability on an IQ test and reading (and/or writing) skills. However, the report noted that the outcomes of IQ tests can contribute to programme planning in that a profile of IQ subtest scores may point to a student's strengths and weaknesses in particular cognitive processes underpinning reading and writing. The report adopted the following working definition of dyslexia that separated description from causal explanations:

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching.

This definition represents dyslexia as a function of the reciprocal effects of learning opportunities and the type and extent of phonological and semantic strengths and weaknesses. Although intra-individual constitutional factors are afforded a central place, environmental factors may also play a key role since the environment is regarded as the source of educational and psychological intervention. Reference to a 'staged process of assessment through teaching' points to the importance of providing appropriate teaching in the first instance, and taking the student's response to such teaching into account during assessment. A potential drawback of the British Psychological Society's definition is that it does not distinguish between students with decoding difficulties arising from dyslexia, and those that arise from low ability.

A number of researchers have also provided evidence that the testing or observation of discrepancies other than those between ability and reading achievement would be more useful in the process of identifying students with

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<sup>26</sup> Siegel, L.S. (1992). An evaluation of the discrepancy definition of dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 10, 618-629.

<sup>27</sup> British Psychological Society. (1999). *Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment*. Leicester: Author.

dyslexia. For example, it has been shown that students with dyslexia display a discrepancy between their scores on listening comprehension tests and reading comprehension tests in favour of the former.<sup>28,29</sup> This finding might be expected since listening comprehension does not require the decoding skills which may be deficient in students with dyslexia. Attention has also been drawn to the usefulness of discrepancies between oral and written language, discrepancies between curricular areas,<sup>30</sup> and discrepancies between non-word reading skills compared to word reading.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, there are problems associated with the use of a full-scale IQ as a measure of potential in reading and related areas, and with the application of discrepancy criteria involving assessed intelligence and reading achievement in identifying dyslexia. It is for these reasons that the Task Force proposes an alternative model of identification in Chapter 5 of this report. This alternative model, which, in the initial phases, is based on the Department of Education and Science's *Learning Support Guidelines*, may involve the student moving through a series of phases, each of which involves a progressively more intensive response to his or her learning needs, in terms of assessment and of the provision of supplementary teaching linked to specified learning targets. The first phase occurs when the child is between 3 and 5 years and involves attention to the child's learning differences in his or her classroom or pre-school setting. The second phase occurs when the student is between 5 and 7 years, and has learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. The student may require additional support from class and learning support teachers. The third phase, which, for most students, would occur between 7 and 12 years of age, includes a formal consideration, by a multi-disciplinary team, of the severity of the student's learning difficulties, the student's response to the interventions that have been put in place by the school, the outcomes of ability and achievement tests, and whether or not special education provision is warranted. A fourth and final phase occurs during post-primary education, where the student's learning needs may shift from basic learning processes to the acquisition of compensatory strategies and study skills. The implications of the model for the identification of dyslexia are addressed in Chapter 5.

Linked to the proposal for a phased model of identification are the criteria that would be applied by the multi-disciplinary team in identifying students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and, by implication, in deciding whether or not special education services are warranted. Following a review of current

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<sup>28</sup> Aaron, P.G. (1989). *Dyslexia and Hyperlexia*. Antwerp: Kulwer Academic Publications; Aaron, P.G. (1994). Differential diagnosis of reading disabilities. In G. Hale (Ed.), *Dyslexia Matters*. London: Whurr.

<sup>29</sup> Stanovich, K. (1991). Discrepancy definitions of reading disability: Has intelligence led us astray? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26, 7-29.

<sup>30</sup> Reid, G. (1996). Difficulties, discrepancies and differences. In G. Reid (Ed.), *Dimensions of Dyslexia: Assessment, Teaching and the Curriculum*. London: Whurr.

<sup>31</sup> Snowling, M. (2000). *Dyslexia*. Oxford: Blackwell.

criteria in Chapter 4, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders such as the National Educational Psychological Service, work towards a consolidation and revision of circulars. This would involve establishing new criteria for access to special education services that take into account the information about a student's difficulties that would accrue if the phased identification model is accepted and implemented, in addition to measures of student ability and achievement.

As part of an ongoing process of revising criteria for access to special education provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, it is important to consider emerging alternative measures of learning potential in the areas of reading, spelling and writing. Any new measures that emerge, and for which there is strong evidence relating to their validity and value, should be given careful consideration in the context of the revision of criteria.

### **3.5 Information Processing and Dyslexia**

Some recent definitions of dyslexia, including the definition proposed by the British Psychological Society, point to the likelihood that phonological processing problems<sup>32</sup> are implicated. One area of processing, phonological awareness, has gained particular prominence in the research literature. Phonological awareness is the awareness of the phonological elements of speech – the segments that are more or less represented by the letters of the alphabet and letter combinations. This awareness, which develops gradually, has been shown to be causally and reciprocally related to reading: phonological awareness is a prerequisite for reading development, while reading itself contributes to the development of phonological awareness. Training in phonological awareness skills has been shown to increase reading and spelling achievement. However, it is also recognised that difficulties in other areas of phonological processing, such as the retrieval of phonological information from long-term memory ('automatised lexical retrieval' or 'rapid naming'),<sup>33</sup> and the formation of accurate and stable phonological representations in working memory may affect the acquisition of phonological awareness and the development of reading skills.<sup>34</sup> Whereas in phonologically more difficult languages, such as English, the greatest difficulties appear to occur in phonological processing, in phonologically easier languages such as German, lack of skills needed to achieve automatisisation appear to play a greater role.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Phonological processing may be defined as the ability to process sounds in spoken language.

<sup>33</sup> Wolf, M. (1999) Towards a New Conceptualisation of Dyslexia. In *Annals of Dyslexia*, XLIX, 3-28.

<sup>34</sup> Vellutino, F.R., Scanlon, D.M., & Reid Lyon, G. (2000). Differentiating between difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor readers: More evidence against the IQ-achievement discrepancy definition of reading disability. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 3, 223-238.

<sup>35</sup> Grigorenko, E.L. (2000). Developmental Dyslexia: An Update on Genes, Brains and Environments. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42, 91-125.

Dyslexia is often characterised by phonological processing problems including difficulties with phonological awareness and automatic retrieval of phonological information from memory

A number of other processing differences have been linked to phonological processing and to dyslexia. These include differences in neuro-biological processing<sup>36</sup> and in visual processing.<sup>37</sup> Recent research on neuro-biological processing, for example, has involved isolating particular phonological processes in particular areas of the brain and examining the inter-connectivity of those areas as subjects engage in a range of phonological tasks. Such research, which is possible using functional brain-imaging methods such as fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), provides strong evidence of a biological basis for reading and reading disability.<sup>38</sup> However, research in this area is still evolving, and it may be some time before there are direct implications for identification or instruction.

The precise role of visual processing deficits in dyslexia remains unclear, and it is now acknowledged that linguistic and visual explanations of dyslexia may not be mutually exclusive.<sup>39</sup> One line of research has found differences between discrepancy-defined dyslexics and normal readers in the structure of the magnocellular pathway between the retina and the cortex. However, it has also been argued that such differences may be just an accidental concomitant of reading difficulty.<sup>40, 41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Shaywitz, B., Pugh, K.R., et al. (2001). The neurobiology of reading and reading disability (Dyslexia). In M. L. Kamil et al., *Handbook of Research on Reading (Vol. III)*, pp. 229-249. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>37</sup> Willows, D.M., Kruk, R.S., & Corcos, E. (Eds.) (1993). *Visual Processes in Reading and Reading Disability*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>38</sup> Shaywitz, B.A., Pugh, K.R., Fenner, A.R., Fulbright, R.K, Fletcher, J.M., Gore, J.C., & Shaywitz, S.E. (2000). The neurobiology of reading and reading disability. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson and R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research (Vol. III)*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>39</sup> British Psychological Society. (1999). *Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment*. Leicester: Author.

<sup>40</sup> Hogben, J.H. (1997). How does visual transient deficit affect reading? In C. Hulme and M. Snowling (Eds.), *Dyslexia, Biology, Cognition and Intervention*. London: Whurr.

<sup>41</sup> Miles, T. (2000). *Dyslexia: A Hundred Years On*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

### 3.6 Dyslexia and Its Main Characteristics

The Task Force proposes the following description of the term dyslexia:

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

It recognises that the learning difficulties arising from dyslexia:

- occur across the lifespan, and may manifest themselves in different ways at different ages;
- may-co-exist with difficulties in the area of number;
- 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 circumstances;
- co-exist with other learning difficulties such as Attention Deficit Disorder, and may or may not represent a primary difficulty.

Finally, it is recognised that, since students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia range along a continuum from mild to severe, they require a continuum of interventions and other services.

Since the difficulties presented by students with dyslexia range along a continuum from mild to severe, there is a need for a continuum of interventions and other services.
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## CHAPTER 4

### REVIEW OF CURRENT PROVISION AND SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ARISING FROM DYSLEXIA

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and reviews the provision and services that are currently available for students with reading difficulties, including difficulties arising from dyslexia. The following issues are addressed:

- (i) Provision of support by class teachers and learning support teachers (primary level) (Sec. 4.2);
- (ii) Provision of special educational services (primary level) (Sec. 4.3);
- (iii) Provision of support by subject, learning-support, and resources teachers (post-primary level) (Sec. 4.4);
- (vi) Provision of reasonable accommodation in state examinations (Sec. 4.5);
- (vi) Exemption from the study of Irish (Sec. 4.6);
- (vii) Provision through other intervention programmes (Sec. 4.7);
- (viii) Provision of psychological services (Sec. 4.8)
- (vii) Preservice teacher education and in-career professional development (Sec. 4.9);
- (viii) Provision of alternative therapies (Sec. 4.10)
- (ix) Provision of services by voluntary and statutory organisations (Sec. 4.11).

Throughout the chapter, reference is made to submissions to the Task Force by parents, teachers and organisations. Recommendations are put forward for the development of provision and services for students with dyslexia.

#### 4.2 Provision of Support by Class Teachers and Learning Support Teachers (Primary Level)

A range of provision is currently available to primary-level students with learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia. Provision includes additional support from the student's class teacher and supplementary teaching from a learning-support (remedial) teacher. Another form of provision, special education provision, is considered in a subsequent section.

##### *4.2.1 Additional Support from the Class Teacher*

The provision of additional support by a student's class teacher is at the discretion of the teacher, though the provision of such support is formalised if supplementary teaching from a learning-support teacher is also provided (see below). Submissions made to the Task Force by parents expressed the view that while some class teachers are very supportive of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, others are not sufficiently familiar with dyslexia to

identify students who may be at risk of developing difficulties, and therefore may not be in a position to provide appropriate support or seek additional help.

#### **4.2.2 Supplementary Teaching from a Learning-Support Teacher**

The learning-support service at primary level has been extended in recent years to the extent that all schools with a student-teacher ratio of 10:1 or above have access to a learning-support teacher. In January 2001, there were 1,480 learning-support teachers in the primary system. Central to the role of the learning-support teacher is the provision of learning support (remedial teaching) to children with low achievement.<sup>42</sup> Supplementary teaching is usually provided to small groups of students or to individuals who are withdrawn to a learning-support room. In a minority of situations, supplementary teaching may take place in the mainstream classroom. Currently, students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, that are not severe enough to qualify for special education provision may receive supplementary teacher and/or other support from a learning support teacher, in line with the policies being implemented by the student's school.

A study of the learning support service at primary level in 1997<sup>43</sup> showed that the service placed a strong emphasis on early intervention (20% of students in first and second classes were in receipt of supplementary teaching from a learning support teacher), and that the service was successful in raising the reading achievement of some students with learning difficulties. However, the report raised a number of issues about the quality of service. It was found that:

- average caseloads of learning support teachers were large, ranging from 40 students (non-shared learning support teachers) to 50 students (shared learning support teachers);<sup>44</sup>
- selection of students was based on local (school-based) norms rather than on national norms;
- the average duration of learning support in English for individual students exceeded 4 years;
- a significant minority of learning-support teachers in the Eastern region were unable to gain access to officially sanctioned one-year, part-time inservice courses because of a shortage of places;
- principal teachers and learning-support teachers expressed concern that the Department did not provide ongoing inservice training and support for learning-support teachers;
- although favourably disposed to a consultative/co-operative model of service delivery, learning support teachers spent much of the school day withdrawing students for small-group instruction.

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<sup>42</sup> Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning-Support Guidelines*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>43</sup> Shiel, G., Morgan, M., & Larney, R. (1998). *Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>44</sup> 'Shared' learning support teachers provide a learning support service in more than one school.

Several submissions to the Task Force referred to difficulties in providing appropriate learning support to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. In particular, it was argued that shared learning-support teachers do not have sufficient time to provide the type of frequent, intensive teaching that students with dyslexia may need. Other submissions stated that the learning needs of students with dyslexia cannot be adequately addressed in groups of six or more students, though clearly the appropriateness of instructional arrangements relate to the nature of the difficulties experienced by students.

The recently issued *Learning Support Guidelines* address some of the problems raised in the submissions. Guidelines are provided on:

- the role of the leaning support teacher in providing supplementary teaching to students experiencing low achievement and/or learning difficulties, and in supporting and consulting with colleagues;
- the identification of students with low achievement and/or learning difficulties (it is recommended that priority be given to pupils who score at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on appropriate, nationally-normed standardised tests of reading and/or mathematics);
- the implementation of structured procedures for diagnostic assessment;
- individual programme planning and record keeping in respect of pupils who are in receipt of supplementary teaching;
- the size of the learning-support teachers caseload (defined in the guidelines as 30 students in any given instructional term)
- the involvement of parents and class teachers in planning and implementing individual learning programmes;
- procedures for the discontinuation of supplementary teaching.

The *Guidelines* provide a coherent model for assessing, planning, teaching and reviewing that is applicable to the needs of all students with learning difficulties for whom supplementary teaching is being provided. This model is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this report in the context of a phased model for identifying students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

A particular concern of the Task Force is the lack of a dedicated system for the co-ordination and support of the work of learning support teachers, or for the provision of on-going inservice training. This means that, outside of a one-year part-time course, learning-support teachers may not receive up-to-date information and support on implementing teaching and learning strategies, including those designed to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Other concerns include the large numbers of schools in some learning support clusters, and the large caseloads of some learning support teachers.

### **4.2.3 Conclusion**

Submissions to the Task Force indicate that some class teachers may not be adequately prepared to identify and address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Structural and organisational difficulties within the learning support service may also militate against the provision of appropriate services for students who need them, including students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. If implemented, the *Learning Support Guidelines* should go some way towards improving this situation. However, the development of a system for co-ordinating and supporting the work of learning support teachers on an ongoing basis, including the provision of information and support to principal teachers and learning-support teachers on matters related to dyslexia would also be desirable. Such a system would require the appointment of a national co-ordinator and regional co-ordinators, each of whom would work directly with principal teachers and learning support teachers. It is estimated that up to 50 such co-ordinators would be needed to provide the service. There is also a need for the Department of Education and Science to monitor the implementation of provision for students with dyslexia.

The Task Force recommends that:

- In order to better meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the Department of Education and Science should expedite implementation of its *Learning Support Guidelines*, including the provision by a learning support teacher of intensive supplementary teaching to no more than 30 students in any instructional term. [Recommendation 11]
- The Department of Education and Science should support primary and post-primary schools in providing a level of learning support that is flexible and appropriate to the needs of each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Where necessary, intervention should include one-to-one teaching from a learning support teacher. [R12]
- Where the learning support service in a primary or post-primary school cannot meet the needs of all students with very low achievement and/or learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the Department of Education and Science should allocate additional learning-support hours on a temporary or permanent basis in accordance with identified needs. [R13]
- The Department of Education and Science should appoint a national learning-support co-ordinator and 50 regional learning-support advisors to provide schools and learning-support teachers at the primary and post-primary levels with advice and support. [R14]

- No more than four to five schools should constitute a cluster for the purpose of creating and/or maintaining learning support positions. [R16]

Recommendations on the in-career development of class and learning support teachers are put forward in a later section of this chapter.

### **4.3 Provision of Special Education Services (Primary-Level)**

As indicated earlier, the Department of Education and Science provides special education services for students with dyslexia. Three forms of provision are made: resource teaching support, enrolment in a special class for students with specific learning disabilities in a designated ordinary school; or enrolment in a special school for students with specific learning disabilities.

#### **4.3.1 Resource Teaching Support**

Resource teachers are appointed to schools on an ex-quota basis to provide additional teaching support for children who have special educational needs arising from disabilities and are fully integrated into mainstream schools. Resource teaching posts are allocated to schools or clusters of schools where there is a sufficient number of children with special educational needs to warrant a full-time post. Where there is an insufficient number of children to warrant a full-time post, part-time teaching hours may be granted. The criteria for eligibility for resource teaching arising from a specific learning disability<sup>45</sup> (including dyslexia) are outlined in a circular letter issued to schools in 1999 by the Department of Education and Science.<sup>46</sup> In the circular, it is stated that children with a specific learning disability are eligible for resource teaching if they have been assessed by a psychologist as:

- Being of average intelligence or higher.
- Having a degree of learning disability, specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics, which places them at or below the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile on suitable, standardised norm-referenced tests.

The caseload of a resource teacher is normally made up of students with a variety of special needs. Each child with a disability is given a weighting, determined by the nature and degree of disability and the current student-teacher ratio in special schools and special classes for that disability. A student with a specific learning disability currently counts for 1/11th of a teacher post and is normally allocated 2½ hours of resource teaching support each week.

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<sup>45</sup> Throughout the remainder of this Report, the term 'specific learning difficulty' is used in preference to 'specific learning disability'; the term 'specific learning disability' is used when discussing official documents which use this terminology.

<sup>46</sup> Circular 8/99. Applications for the Services of a Part-time Resource Teacher to Assist a School in Providing Education to Meet the Needs and Abilities of Children with Disabilities.

The number of resource teaching posts in schools has increased very significantly since the announcement by the Minister for Education and Science in November 1998 that all students with disabilities in mainstream schools would have an automatic right to provision to meet their needs. By January 2001, a total of 520 full-time resource teachers, serving 997 primary schools, had been sanctioned by the Department of Education and Science. In addition, a total of 5,551 part-time resource-teaching hours had been sanctioned for students with special needs in primary schools. Figures are not available, however, on the number of students with specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia) who avail of resource teaching support from resource teachers, or the number of part-time hours that are allocated to students with such difficulties. Clearly, such information would be useful in appraising the adequacy of current provision.

While the provision of resource teaching support to students with specific learning difficulties in students' own schools was generally welcomed in submissions to the Task Force, some parents indicated that the schools attended by children for whom resource teaching had been sanctioned were unable to identify teachers with the appropriate experience who would be willing to provide support on a part-time basis. Schools themselves indicated to the Task Force that they experienced difficulties in recruiting appropriately trained teachers to provide resource-teaching support on a part-time basis.

Submissions to the Task Force pointed out that, while students enrolled in a special class in an ordinary school attract a separate capitation grant, those in receipt of resource teaching, though their needs are similar, do not.

Unlike special classes and special schools, where enrolment is for one or two years, a maximum duration of resource-teaching support for students with specific learning difficulties is not specified, though the initial duration of such support is specified and continuation is subject to an annual review.

#### ***4.3.2 Special Classes Attached to Mainstream Schools***

Special classes (units) for children with specific learning difficulties (including difficulties arising from dyslexia) have been established in designated mainstream schools where there is a sufficient number of students with such difficulties to form a class. The student-teacher ratio for these classes is 11:1 and placement is for either one or two years. By January 2001, 19 such classes had been established – ten classes in Dublin, three in Limerick, two in both Clare and Wexford, and one each in Galway and Kerry.

Students who have been placed in a special class for children with specific learning difficulties in an ordinary school are included in the mainstream enrolment figures for the school as well as for the special class. This provision is in place to promote the inclusion of students with specific learning difficulties in mainstream classes. It is expected that students with such difficulties who are

enrolled in the special class would spend at least part of each school day working alongside their peers in a mainstream classroom. An enhanced capitation grant is payable to schools which have special classes for students with a specific learning difficulty. For each such student under age 12, a grant of £267 is payable. The corresponding grant for students over 12 is £427. The standard grant that is payable in respect of each student enrolled in a mainstream class is £64.

The criteria for access to special classes (and special schools, see below) are as follows:

Assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence should place general intellectual ability within the average range, or above . . . . There must be an obvious discrepancy between general intellectual ability and performance on a standardised test of reading ability . . . It would be expected that not more than 2 per cent of the overall student population would be found to be in this category. Performance in basic literacy skills as measured by a standardised test should be at a very low level compared to the vast majority of students in a similar age cohort. Consideration should also be given to the child's speaking, writing and spelling skills as well as to his/her level of adaptation to learning within mainstream education, to his/her rate of progress in other aspects of the curriculum and to his/her social and personal development . . . Students transferring to a special school or support unit for students with specific learning difficulties should have completed Second Class in a primary school or be at least eight years old on the first day of the school year.<sup>47</sup>

These criteria are somewhat broader than those that pertain for access to resource teaching, as set out in Circular 8/99, in that they include a consideration of progress in aspects of the curriculum other than reading/writing, the student's social and personal development and his/her adaptation to learning within mainstream education. Significantly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile is not specified as a cut-off point for access. Taken together, these criteria suggest that it may be easier for students to gain access to special schools/classes than to resource teaching support.

#### **4.3.3 Special Schools for Children with Specific Learning Difficulties**

The Department of Education and Science has established four primary schools for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia. These schools were established in the 1970s and 1980s and are situated in large centres of population – three schools in Dublin and one in Cork. The four schools cater for a total of approximately 250 students. Criteria for enrolment are the same as those for special classes in designated ordinary schools. As is the case

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<sup>47</sup> Special Education Section, Department of Education and Science. (June, 1998). Revised Guidelines for Enrolment of Children with Specific Learning Disability (SLD).

with special classes, these schools have a student-teacher ratio of 11:1. Placement of children in these schools is for one or two years, after which they return to mainstream education.

#### **4.3.4 Conclusion**

Approximately 450 students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia are enrolled in special classes and special schools in the current school year. Others receive special education provision in their own schools in the form of resource teaching support from a resource teacher. Clearly, the level of provision has increased significantly in recent years. However, the Task Force struggled to evaluate the appropriateness of this provision for the following reasons:

- No information was available on the numbers of students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, who were in receipt of resource teaching support from full-time or part-time resource teachers;
- No comparative information was available on the effects of special education provision on the achievement and general development of students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who attend special schools or special classes, or who receive resource teaching support.

Clearly, such information would be important in guiding policy in relation to the provision of special education services for students with specific learning difficulties. Certainly, it appears that considerably fewer students in Ireland with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are in receipt of special education services than in the United States, where 5.58% of students (aged 6-17 years) are in receipt of services (see Chapter 3).

In the absence of more specific information, it seems appropriate to continue in the short term with the establishment of special classes for students with specific learning difficulties in mainstream schools, particularly in light of the difficulties encountered by many schools in recruiting trained resource teachers to work with students on a part-time basis, and, as indicated later in this chapter, difficulties encountered by primary-level resource teachers in accessing specialised training. The Task Force also notes the uneven geographic distribution of such classes, and proposes that the Department of Education and Science develop a strategic plan for the establishment of additional classes in mainstream primary schools throughout the country. If possible, this plan should be informed by relevant research.

The Task Force notes that some students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may not be enabled to access special education services because they do not meet specified criteria relating to ability or achievement. In line with the view of dyslexia as a continuum of specific learning difficulties (see Chapter 3),

the Task Force believes that these students should be afforded a level of support that is commensurate with their learning needs, including, where necessary, one-to-one support from a learning support teacher.

Related to the matter of access to special education services are the apparent differences in access criteria for, on the one hand, resource teaching, and, on the other hand, enrolment in special classes in mainstream schools and special schools. These differences need to be resolved.

The Task Force notes that the pupil-teacher ratio for special classes and special schools for students with specific learning difficulties remains at 11:1, despite the improvement in the ratio in ordinary classes. This, coupled with the fact that students in special classes and special schools may have more than one specific learning difficulty, suggests a need to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in such classes/schools, or to identify other ways in which teachers might be assisted in the development and implementation of appropriate learning programmes and in liaising with students' mainstream schools. Such work could be facilitated by providing a resource teacher post to special schools or by appointing appointment special needs assistants.

The Task Force notes that, at primary level, enrolment in a special class or school for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia is for one or two years. The Task Force believes this should be extended to a third year if a comprehensive review of a student's progress suggests that the student would benefit from additional specialised input.

Finally, the Task Force notes the difficulties encountered by some students in re-integrating into mainstream classes following one or two years in a special class or special school for students with specific learning disabilities, and feels that the re-integration of these students should be facilitated by a visit to the mainstream school by a teacher from the student's special class/school who would discuss with the students' teacher(s) how best to continue to meet the student's needs and to build on what had been achieved in the special education setting through the preparation and implementation of an individual learning programme.

The Task Force recommends that:

- In the absence of equitable access, and contingent on the outcomes of relevant research, the Department of Education and Science should develop a strategic plan for the establishment of additional special classes in mainstream primary schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R2]

- The number of resource hours sanctioned for primary-level students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia, should, where necessary, exceed the current limit of 2.5 hours per week. [R3]
- A pupil-teacher ratio of 9:1 or equivalent should be implemented in special classes in mainstream primary schools and in special schools for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia. [R4]
- Special needs assistants should be assigned to special classes and special schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, on a needs' basis so that teachers can better plan and implement programmes that address students' individual learning needs. [R5]
- Enrolment of students in special classes or special schools for students with specific learning difficulties should be extended beyond the current limit of two years if, following a formal review of progress, a third year is deemed necessary. [R6]
- A systematic approach to managing the transition to a mainstream school should be implemented in the case of each student with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who has completed a period of enrolment in a special school or special class in a designated school, and should involve liaison between the student's special class/school teacher and the teachers in the mainstream school. [R7]
- In consultation with relevant bodies, including the National Educational Psychological Service, the Department of Education and Science should review and amalgamate current circulars dealing with the identification of specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, to remove inconsistencies between circulars, and to incorporate the phased model of identification and other changes recommended in this report. [R8]
- The inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science should, as provided for in the Education Act 1998, monitor and report on the implementation by schools of strategies designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including learning support and special education services. [R24]
- The Department of Education and Science should commission a study to compare the relative effectiveness and appropriateness to the needs of individual students and their parents of the three models of special education provision that are in place for primary-level students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia –

resource teaching support, enrolment in a special class, and enrolment in a special school. [R25]

#### **4.4 Provision of Support by Subject, Learning-Support and Resource Teachers (Post-Primary Level)**

Support for post-primary students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may be provided by subject teachers, learning-support teachers and resource teachers, while year heads, guidance counsellors, and other professionals may also provide input. Interventions at this level may include teaching basic skills in reading and spelling, and may extend to developing self-regulated learning strategies, note taking skills, study skills, exam strategies, occupational exploration, accessing knowledge and skills, and obtaining reasonable accommodation in exams. For some students, the increased use of information and communication technologies may be warranted.

No circulars or guidelines have been issued to post-primary schools on the use of resource posts or resource hours other than a general advice that hours are to be used for the purposes intended. Students who have been in receipt of resource teaching support at primary level attract continued support at post-primary level, subject to an application being made by the post-primary school. New assessments may be required when a previous one is out of date. It is also open to a principal to apply to the Department of Education and Science for additional teaching resources if s/he considers that the school is unable to meet the needs of a student – or group of students – within existing resources. Applications must include details of the pupil(s) involved, details of disabilities, an assessment by the principal of the quantity and type of additional resources required, and copies of any existing reports on students. The area psychologist investigates the application, assessments are undertaken, if required, and recommendations in respect of additional resources are made, following discussion with the principal and relevant teachers. The establishment of resource posts is a matter for the Teacher Section, Post-Primary Administration, Department of Education and Science. The procedures followed by the psychologist for identifying dyslexia are a matter of professional judgement. The appropriate level of support (with the SERC Report and the primary-level circulars as guidelines) is decided in consultation with the main stakeholders. The psychologist makes the final recommendation. The allocation is notified to the school by the Department of Education and Science and is usually subject to review.

##### **4.4.1 *Involvement of Subject Teachers***

Relatively little information is available on how subject teachers work with students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. According to the submissions received by the Task Force, many parents of students with such difficulties experienced frustration in their dealings with subject teachers, sometimes having to inform each of their child's teachers about the presence of a learning difficulty and the implications for teaching and assessment. Other

problems identified in the submissions included sub-optimal transfer of information from primary to post-primary schools and from year to year, inappropriate streaming, limited subject choice, and limited support in the use of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). In addition, parents reported difficulties in accessing accurate information about the provision and services that are available.

#### **4.4.2 Assistance from Learning-Support Teachers**

There are 560 learning support teacher posts sanctioned at present in post-primary schools. Schools with more than 600 pupils are entitled to a 1.0 WTE (whole-time equivalent) post, while schools with fewer than 600 pupils are allocated a 0.5 WTE post. Each post is an exquota appointment covering 12 to 15 hours of instruction a week, and a further three hours of testing, diagnosis, contact with parents, and contact with fellow teachers.<sup>48</sup> No information is available on the numbers of students with dyslexia who receive direct assistance from learning support teachers.

A number of small-scale surveys conducted in recent years suggest difficulties with the implementation of learning-support services in post-primary schools.<sup>49, 50</sup> Among the positive points emerging from these studies were:

- some evidence of the implementation of 'team teaching', in which the learning-support teacher and subject teacher work co-operatively to address the learning needs of students, often in the students' own classrooms;
- some evidence of the development of links with primary-level teachers, and access to students' primary report cards;
- the development in some schools of school-wide literacy plans.

Among the negative findings reported in the studies were:

- failure by some schools to implement Department guidelines on the amount of time allocated to learning support activities by exquota learning support teachers;
- frequent changes of personnel in the learning support posts, with teachers often choosing to return to subject teaching because of high levels of frustration and stress;
- lack of training for subject teachers on accommodating students with learning difficulties ;
- lack of support for learning support teachers from some subject-teacher colleagues.

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<sup>48</sup> Such posts are governed by Circular 33/79, 'Establishment of Additional Posts for Teachers Qualified to Engage in Remedial Education.'

<sup>49</sup> McLoughlin, P. (1999). Remedial Teaching at Second Level in Connaught. *Learn*, 21, 58-65.

<sup>50</sup> Fitzpatrick, B. (2000). 'Shocking Findings' in TUI 2000 Survey of Remedial Education. *Learn*, 22, 35-38.

Clearly, there is a need to study in detail the provision of learning support services in post-primary schools and to address any problems that arise, with a view to providing optimal instructional environments for students with learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia.

A number of parents of students in private post-primary schools raised with the Task Force difficulties they had encountered in accessing support services for their children, since the Department of Education and Science does not sanction the appointment of learning-support teachers in some recognised private post-primary schools. The Task Force believes that this matter should be addressed so that all post-primary students with dyslexia have access to learning support services, and their learning support teachers have access to sanctioned inservice courses for learning-support teachers.

#### **4.4.3 Assistance from Resource Teachers**

There are currently 240 resource (special needs) teachers working in post-primary schools. Although not governed by Circular letter, these teachers work with students with a range of difficulties. Information on the numbers of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who are availing of additional provision from a resource teacher is not available. Communication between the Task Force and the Department of Education and Science indicated that the criteria for access to resource teaching are broadly similar to those that apply at primary level.

#### **4.4.4 Conclusion**

While there are currently 560 learning support teachers and 240 resource teachers working in post-primary schools, no information is available on how many students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, are served by these teachers. Evidence from a limited number of small-scale studies and submissions made by parents and teachers suggest that the system as operates at present falls short of meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties, including students whose difficulties arise from dyslexia.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should commission a study on the operation and effectiveness of the learning-support and resource-teaching services in post-primary schools, including the nature of provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R26]
- The inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science should, as provided for in the Education Act 1998, monitor and report on the implementation by schools of strategies designed to address the learning

needs of students with dyslexia, including learning support and special education services. [R24]

- The Department of Education and Science should arrange for the maintenance of a database of students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, who are in receipt of learning support and/or special education services in primary and post-primary schools. [R28]
- the National Educational Psychological Service Agency (NEPS) should, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, provide all schools with guidelines on procedures for identifying students who may have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia or may be at risk of developing such difficulties. [R57]
- The Department of Education and Science should sanction learning support posts on a needs basis in recognised private post-primary schools, thereby enabling recognised learning support teachers in such schools to attend in-career development courses in learning support sanctioned by the Department. [R15]

Recommendations on the preservice education and the in-career professional development of teachers are given in a later section of this chapter.

#### **4.5 Provision of Reasonable Accommodation in State Examinations**

The Department of Education and Science Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations submitted a report, *Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations*, to the Minister for Education and Science in January 2000.<sup>51</sup> This section reviews arrangements (now called accommodations) for candidates before and after publication of the Expert Advisory Group's Report, and addresses issues arising from recent changes in accommodations.

According to the Expert Advisory Group, the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations 'rely heavily on performance on written papers which are administered under controlled conditions in a limited time frame at the end of a long period of study. Some candidates may experience difficulty, or may even find it impossible, to communicate what they know in this situation. . . specific learning disabilities are also recognised as giving rise to difficulties' (p. 1). Difficulties that may arise in the following areas for students with dyslexia:

- reading examination questions;
- interpreting charts and diagrams;

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<sup>51</sup> Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations. (January, 2000). *Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations*. Report to the Minister of Education. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

- spelling words accurately
- producing legible answers;
- producing coherent text;
- communicating what is known in the available time.

The Expert Group framed its proposals ‘with the intention of facilitating the operation of a responsible and flexible system, which would enable all candidates to demonstrate their achievements, while preserving the integrity and fairness of an examination, in which special arrangements (accommodations) are operated in a transparent manner’.<sup>52</sup> It noted that, ‘special arrangements are designed to assist a candidate in demonstrating his or her achievements in an examination setting. They are not designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability’.<sup>53</sup> The Expert Group made recommendations in the areas of candidate identification, effective and equitable provision, and treatment and reporting of candidate performance. It was recommended that:

- The condition that a candidate’s general ability be not below average for consideration for special arrangements (accommodations) should be discontinued;
- Examination instruments should be reviewed with the purpose of making them as accessible as possible to all candidates. Readability levels and the time required for completion should be ascertained;
- Special arrangements (accommodations) should, insofar as possible, reflect the nature and complexity of the learning difficulties of each individual candidate;
- Decisions on arrangements (accommodations) should be provided at an earlier date than at present by the Department;
- School examinations should incorporate the special arrangements (from first year in post-primary school if possible);
- An additional 15-20 minutes could be offered to all candidates in subjects areas in the examination in which time constraints may be considered a problem;
- Consideration should be given towards further extending the range of formats for accessing questions (e.g., tape as well as hard copy);
- Assistant examiners should continue to be advised to refer to their Advising Examiners material from candidates which they have difficulty accessing;
- It should be noted on certificates of results if an element or elements of an examination have been omitted or the method of examining has been altered in a substantial way.

Before 2000, schools could apply for accommodations for students with specific learning difficulties, including those that arise from dyslexia, by specifying the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Page 2

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Page 9.

accommodation that was being applied for, and submitting evidence of the student's difficulty, including a recent psychological report (completed in the previous 12 months), and three samples of the student's written work completed under examination conditions. Accommodations were granted where:

on the basis of the evidence put forward or adduced, the candidate's general ability is not below the average range, and the candidate has a specific difficulty in reading, writing or spelling which is of such degree that the candidate would be impaired in reading the questions or in writing the answers or is such that a regular examiner would have difficulty in deciphering the candidate's handwriting. . . . Special arrangements are not approved in the case of students who are slow learners nor in the case of students with a mental handicap. The learning difficulties of such students arise from their level of general intellectual ability and are not due to specific difficulties in reading or writing.<sup>54</sup>

Prior to 2000, the most common accommodation involved flagging the examination scripts of a candidate with specific learning difficulties. The candidate's scripts were then corrected by an experienced examiner who attempted to ensure that the scripts were reliably marked, even when errors arising from dyslexia were apparent. Other accommodations, including the provision of a person to read questions and/or write answers, or the use of a tape recorder, or word processor, were made in cases where a disability was judged to be particularly severe. The Expert Advisory Group observed an increase in the number of applications for accommodations over time (2,300 applications were made in 1994 and 3,200 in 1998), and considerable variation between schools in the number of applications.

In conjunction with the publication of the Expert Advisory Group's report, the following revised arrangements for Certificate examinations from the year 2000 were notified to schools:<sup>55</sup>

- On a pilot basis, an additional 20 minutes would be provided for *all* candidates taking Leaving Certificate papers in Irish, English, History (including Economic History), and Geography (i.e., subjects with a heavy language content);
- Where an exemption is granted to a candidate (for example, use of a reader or a word processor with spell check enabled), an explanatory note, indicating which examination procedures were altered (but not the nature of the candidate's disability) would be appended to a candidate's certificate;

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<sup>54</sup> Circular S40/94. Certificate Examinations. Special Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities.

<sup>55</sup> Circular S11/2000: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations in Relation to Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations. In addition to the Report, modified arrangements for the 2000 Examinations were issued to schools.

- Applications for accommodations would be considered in respect of candidates whose general intellectual ability was below the average range and who also had a specific learning difficulty;
- Assistant examiners would continue to be advised to refer scripts that they could not access to their supervising examiner, making it unnecessary for schools to apply in individual cases where the concern related to difficulties that might arise in accessing the work of a candidate;
- A more independent appeals procedure would be implemented and would deal with appeals relating to the proposed inclusion of an explanatory note on a candidate's certificate.

Many submissions to the Task Force disagreed with the recent changes to the ways in which the needs of students with dyslexia have been addressed in state examinations. The addition of explanatory notes to the certificates of students who were exempted from elements of the examination was strongly criticised by parents. Similarly, parents indicated a preference for flagging the scripts of candidates with spelling and/or writing difficulties to ensure that they would be corrected by examiners with a knowledge of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Indeed, some submissions pointed to an anomaly whereby students with dyslexia who opted to have their examination scripts flagged (i.e., forwarded as a matter of course for marking by a special examiner) in the 1999 Junior Certificate examination or earlier, will not have this option in the Leaving Certificate in 2001 or later. Submissions also referred to the need to inform candidates as early as possible if a particular accommodation had been granted. Some submissions called for training in the candidate's school if the use of a tape recorder or word processor had been granted. Indeed, as indicated above, the Expert Group on Certificate Examinations also made a recommendation relating to these points.

In Circular S70/2000, which was issued to schools by the Department of Education and Science in Autumn 2000, it was indicated that:

From 2001, a candidate whose specific learning disability is not severe enough to warrant the grant of such facilities (i.e. use of a tape recorder or computer with spell-check), may nonetheless opt for a waiver in relation to the assessment of spelling/grammar etc. in language subjects. Decisions on such applications will be determined on the basis of the evidence available in relation to the candidate's special needs. Where this arrangement is granted, the candidate will have his/her grade determined on the balance of the work in the subject and the results will be accompanied by an explanatory note to the effect that all elements of the language subject in question were assessed except the spelling and grammatical elements.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Circular S70/2000. Information Note Regarding the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations which Apply at the 2001 Certificate Examinations.

While S70/2000 applies to both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations, the manner in which applications are dealt with differs. At Junior Certificate level, the school certifies that the student has a specific learning difficulty, and the form<sup>57</sup> is sent to the Department and, where appropriate, confirmed within 10 working days. This procedure, which is currently operating on a pilot basis, is outlined in Circular S76/2000.<sup>58</sup>

At Leaving Certificate level, application must now be made under circulars S40/94 and S11/2000, and a different form, S.A. 1/2001 is used. This form must be accompanied by samples of the student's written work and the results of any tests performed by the learning support teacher. If a psychological assessment has been performed in the previous 3 years, it should be included. The completed application form and accompanying information is forwarded to the National Educational Psychological Service, where the merits of the case are judged, and a psychological assessment may be made for validation.

The Task Force notes the challenge faced by candidates with dyslexia in attempting to demonstrate their achievements in both state certificate examinations, and the concerns of parents and candidates themselves that their work may not receive due consideration from examiners. The Task Force also notes recent proposals to reform the Junior Certificate Examination that may result in a broader range of assessment tasks, including projects and portfolios, being taken into account in assessing students' achievements,<sup>59</sup> and looks forward to the timely implementation of such reforms in all state certificate examinations.

The Task Force recommends that:

- In light of recent equality legislation, the Department of Education and Science should refer to the Director of Equality and the National Disability Authority the practice of appending explanatory notes to the certificates of candidates with specific learning difficulties who are granted certain accommodations in state examinations. [R18]
- The Department of Education and Science should examine a range of accommodations that might be offered to all students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, in state examinations, including the provision of test papers with enlarged print, and the option of listening to the examination questions on tape. [R19]

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<sup>57</sup> This form, which is not numbered, is called 'Applications for Reasonable Accommodations at the Junior Certificate 2001 Examination on the Grounds of a Specific Learning Difficulty/Difficulties.

<sup>58</sup> Circular S76/2000. Junior Certificate Examination 2001 – Students with Special Needs – Applications for Reasonable Accommodations. Trial of Revised Application Procedures.

<sup>59</sup> e.g., National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (1993). *A Programme for Reform: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Towards the New Century*. Dublin: Author.

- The Department of Education and Science should inform examination candidates with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, at least six months beforehand whether their applications for reasonable accommodations have been successful so that schools can be supported in providing appropriate preparation and training. [R20]

#### 4.6 Exemption from the Study of Irish (Gaeilge)

Students in primary and post-primary schools with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, in the area of English may be granted exemption from the study of Irish (Gaeilge). Criteria for exemption at primary level come under Circular 12/96 (a revision of Circular 18/79). According to Circular 12/96,<sup>60</sup> students who may be allowed an exemption are those who

. . . function intellectually at average or above average level but have a specific learning disability of such a degree of severity that they fail to achieve expected levels of attainment in basic language skills in the mother tongue. . .

Other internal and external factors related to low achievement, such as low general ability, poor motivation, poor school attendance or difficulties in social interaction do not merit exemption.

The procedure for gaining an exemption involves the parent submitting an application on behalf of the child to the school principal, along with a copy of a report from a psychological assessment that is less than two years old, and which recommends that the student should be exempt. If school authorities grant an exemption, a certificate is issued.

Post-primary schools may also grant an exemption if a student is functioning intellectually at average or above average level, but has a specific learning difficulty of such a degree of severity that s/he fails to achieve expected levels of achievement in basic language skills in the home tongue. Students receiving an exemption must achieve at, or below, the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on a standardised norm-referenced test of reading or spelling.<sup>61</sup> Again, school authorities must receive a psychological report that is less than two years old, and must issue a certificate to the student, and forward a copy to the Department of Education and Science. Students who received an exemption at primary level may be re-issued with an exemption certificate by their post-primary school.

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<sup>60</sup> Circular 12/96. Revision of Circular 18/79 on Exemption from the Study of Irish.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Department of Education. (April, 1995). *Guidelines for Psychologists on Assessment and Reporting*. Dublin: Author.

Submissions to the Task Force called for clearer guidelines on eligibility for an exemption. Several suggested that the free periods resulting from receipt of an exemption could be used more productively. Still others called for the provision of a broad, non-exam based course in Irish for students with dyslexia who could not study the examination syllabi.

The Task Force notes the difficulties that some parents experienced in gaining access to information about exemptions from the study of Irish (Gaeilge), and views this in the context of a more general difficulty in accessing information about the provision and services that are available for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. The Task Force considers that the provision of advice on this and other matters related to dyslexia would be an appropriate function for the proposed special needs organisers who would be responsible for the development of special education services in their area (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4).

The Task Force recommends that:

- Where a student cannot study a subject because of a specific learning difficulty arising from dyslexia (for example, Gaeilge), schools should make appropriate alternative arrangements. [R46]

#### **4.7 Provision of Other Intervention Programmes**

A number of interventions and additional supports have been put in place in recent years to cater for students attending schools in areas of educational disadvantage. At preschool level these include the Rutland Street Project, the Early Start Preschool Pilot Programme and preschools for children of the travelling community. At primary level, such programmes as the Disadvantaged Area Schools Scheme, the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme, Breaking the Cycle, and the 8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative have been put in place (Appendix D). At post-primary level, the Disadvantaged Areas School Scheme, the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme, and the Stay in School Initiative have been put in place (Appendix D). A support service is also in place for traveller children (Appendix E).

While none of these initiatives is specifically designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, all have the objective of alleviating the effects of educational disadvantage and of improving the quality of, and access to, educational provision.

The Task Force notes the low levels of reading achievement in schools in designated areas of educational disadvantage,<sup>62</sup> and the relatively low progress

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<sup>62</sup> Cosgrove, J., Kellaghan, T., Forde, P., & Morgan, M. (2000). *The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

made by some students in receipt of learning support who attend such schools.<sup>63</sup> It is particularly important that intensive provision be made in such schools for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including students who do not qualify for special education provision.

Two further issues were brought to the attention of the Task Force in relation to meeting the needs of students with dyslexia in schools in designated areas of educational disadvantage: difficulties in recruiting and keeping qualified class, learning support and special needs teachers, and a need to allocate a teacher to co-ordinate the provision of learning support and special needs services in larger schools.

#### **4.8 Provision of Psychological Services**

Access to certain provisions and exemptions for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia is currently contingent upon the outcomes of a recent psychological assessment. For example, access to resource teaching, to exemption from the study of Irish, and to certain accommodations in state examinations, require, among other things, that the results of a recent psychological assessment be submitted. In Ireland, students needing a psychological assessment are likely to be assessed by a psychologist attached to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or to a regional Health Board or voluntary body – where fees are not paid – or by a psychologist working in private practice – where they are.

NEPS was established in September 1999 as a dedicated agency of the Department of Education and Science. The service was formerly known as the Psychological Service of the Department. The main aim of NEPS is to assist in facilitating all students to develop their potential and to maximise the benefits of their educational and other experiences, having particular regard for those with special educational needs. The Education Act 1998 describes the functions of psychologists working with NEPS as involving assessment of the needs of students, advising on policies and strategies for the education of children with special educational needs, and collaborating with parents and teachers in creating an environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning. As of January 2001, there were 75 psychologists working with NEPS. It is intended to expand the service to reach a target of 200 psychologists by 2003, when a service will be available to all schools.

Many of the submissions to the Task Force indicated difficulties in arranging psychological assessments. Several requested greater consultation between parents, teachers and psychologists, and suggested that psychological reports should provide clear and precise recommendations. Reference was made to the shortage of places in postgraduate courses for educational psychologists in Ireland and the potential value of linking such courses to programmes offered by

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<sup>63</sup> Shiel, G., Morgan, M., & Larney, R. (1998). *Study of Remedial Education in Irish Primary Schools. Summary*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Colleges of Education (for example, by offering educational psychology as a subject in B. Ed. degree programmes).

The Task Force is concerned that just six places are available in universities in this state each year for persons wishing to study educational psychology.

In view of the current level of dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the discrepancy model (see Chapter 3) and the inconsistencies and anomalies that have arisen in the criteria for access to provision and services, the Task Force recommends that the Department of Education and Science adopt the model of identification and provision proposed in Chapter 5 of this report, where the outcome of a psychological assessment is just one of several factors considered in identifying dyslexia. It further recommends that the Department, in consultation with relevant statutory bodies (including NEPS), examine the requirements of various circulars that govern access to special education resources, in order to eliminate anomalies and support the least restrictive and most equitable access to resources.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The number of third-level places for the post-graduate training of educational psychologists should be increased in line with the projected national needs and the projected needs of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). [R54]
- The current demand for psychological assessments should be dealt with during the next school year by, for example, providing schools with the funding needed to have the assessments completed by contract psychologists acting in accordance with guidelines provided by the National Educational Psychological Service. [R55]
- The Minister for Education and Science should liaise with the Minister for Health and Children to co-ordinate the transition period as psychological services come to be provided by the National Educational Psychological Service rather than by psychologists under the aegis of Health Boards and/or voluntary bodies. [R56]
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, provide all schools with guidelines on procedures for identifying students who may have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia or may be at risk of developing such difficulties. [R57]
- The National Educational Psychological Service should, in consultation with parents and teachers, assess the psychological needs of students, advise schools on policies and strategies for those with special educational needs, and assist collaboratively in the creation of a school

environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning which students may experience. [R58]

- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be provided with resources to (i) advise schools on such matters as implementing screening and early identification programmes and programme planning; (ii) support students, parents and teachers in addressing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia; (iii) contribute to the continuing professional development of staff members in a school; and (iv) assist in monitoring the effectiveness of interventions implemented in the school. [R59]
- In consultation with relevant statutory bodies, including the National Educational Psychological Service, the Department of Education and Science should review and amalgamate current circulars dealing with the identification of specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia), to remove inconsistencies between circulars, and to incorporate the phased model of identification and other changes recommended in this report. [R8]
- The identification of dyslexia should be based on the phased model of identification outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, and should culminate in a review of the student's learning needs by a multi-disciplinary team drawing on the outcomes of ability and achievement tests, and on information on the student's response to planned changes in his/her class and learning support programmes. [R9]
- Emerging perspectives on the identification of specific learning difficulties, including current discrepancy-based models, should be kept under review, and should be adopted as appropriate. [R10]

#### **4.9 Preservice Teacher Education and In-career Professional Development**

This section focuses on the extent to which teacher education deals with the identification of dyslexia and to provide appropriate interventions. Information was sought by the Task Force from the five Colleges of Education with regard to the extent to which dyslexia was being dealt with on :

- (i) The undergraduate B.Ed. programme for preservice teachers and the Graduate Diploma in Education (if offered);
- (ii) Diploma/Inservice Courses on Remedial Education/Learning Support.

##### **4.9.1 The B.Ed. Degree Course/Graduate Diploma in Education**

Replies were received from all five Colleges. These indicated that all B.Ed. students attend methodology courses on the teaching of oral language, reading

and writing, and that some reference is made to dyslexia in these courses. In addition, it was pointed out that some study of dyslexia is incorporated into modules which deal with Special Educational Needs, and that reference is made to learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in lectures dealing with psychology.

The time allocated to modules on Special Education Needs is in the 30-40 hour range in two of the colleges but no specific details were available on the proportion of this time that is devoted to dyslexia. Another of the colleges indicated that three hours are directly allocated to the topic with a further six hours during which the topic is dealt with indirectly. There is general agreement among the colleges that the issue of dyslexia deserves more dedicated time but that time constraints are a particular difficulty. As indicated in Chapter 1 of this report, the overall structure of preservice teacher education programmes is under review, and a report is expected later in 2001.

The Task Force appreciates the difficulties that Colleges of Education encounter in covering a broad range of topics within a tight time schedule, but feels that more systematic attempts should be made to familiarise preservice teachers with procedures for identifying learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, and with the implementation of appropriate interventions. The Task Force also acknowledges the potential of induction courses for newly qualified teachers to increase teachers' awareness of dyslexia and the issues surrounding identification and intervention.

#### ***4.9.2 Diploma/Inservice Courses in Remedial Education/Learning Support***

Inservice courses for Remedial/Learning Support Teachers are provided at six centres in the country – two in Dublin, and one each in Cork, Limerick, Galway and Sligo. These courses are part-time, with a mixture of week-long and week-end sessions during the course of the school year. Over the past six years (1995-2000), a total of 940 teachers/tutors have availed of these courses. Of these, 549 were primary teachers, 350 were post-primary teachers and 41 were tutors in Youthreach Programmes, in Community Training Centres and in the Prison Service.

The time specifically devoted to the study of dyslexia on these courses ranges from 3 hours to 10.5 hours, with an average of 6-7 hours. In some cases, assignments chosen by participants for detailed study and research deal with dyslexia.

#### ***4.9.3 Inservice Courses for Resource/Special Education Teachers***

Because of the rapid expansion of teaching posts in special education and learning support in recent years, demands from teachers for in-career development far exceed the availability of places on established courses. The increased number of teachers in special education means that the models of

training which have operated successfully up to now are no longer adequate and new developments in this area are required.

Teachers who work in resource posts, special classes or special schools for children with specific learning difficulties are eligible to attend a full-time one year, in-service diploma in special education at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. However, with just 25 places available on the course each year, not all teachers wishing to take the course can secure a place. A number of week-long induction courses for resource teachers have also been provided during the past school-year.

Training courses for resource teachers working in post-primary schools are currently provided by the Church of Ireland College in Rathmines, Dublin. In the current year, two courses on the teaching of students with learning difficulties are offered: a course leading to a Certificate in the Teaching of Students with Learning Difficulties, which is being attended by 30 resource teachers, and a course leading to a Diploma in Special Educational Needs (post-primary level) which is being attended by 15 resource teachers.

The Department of Education, University College Dublin, offers a Higher Diploma in Remedial and Special Education (HDRSE).<sup>64</sup> The HDRSE is a one-year full-time course in compensatory and remedial education for qualified teachers at the pre-school, primary and post-primary levels. The course, which is recognised by the Department of Education and Science, is designed to equip qualified teachers (up to 20 per year) with the skills necessary to function to maximum effectiveness as learning support, resource or special education teachers at all levels of the school system.

#### ***4.9.4 In-career Development Courses for Class and Subject Teachers***

The submissions by parents to the Task Force indicated that, while some teachers were quite knowledgeable about dyslexia, and supportive of efforts to address students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, others were less knowledgeable and were therefore unable to allay parents' concerns and tailor instruction to children's learning needs.

The Task Force considers it essential that preservice teacher education programmes and in-career professional development courses provide teachers with adequate information about the identification of dyslexia and the provision of appropriate instruction to students. Preservice education can play an important role in providing teachers with an initial understanding of dyslexia and how students' difficulties arising from dyslexia can be addressed. Inservice courses can serve to broaden teachers' initial understandings, to familiarise them with new developments in the field, and to explore ways of implementing whole-

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<sup>64</sup> Prior to 1997, this course was known as the Diploma in Remedial and Compensatory Education.

school and in-class strategies for addressing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

#### **4.9.5 Conclusion**

Clearly, both preservice teacher education courses and in-career development courses for teachers are potentially important vehicles for raising teachers' awareness about learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia. Such courses also have the potential to assist schools in planning to address students' learning difficulties in a manner that is effective and that addresses the concerns of parents. It is for these reasons that the Task Force proposes a range of measures to enhance teachers' awareness of specific learning difficulties/dyslexia.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The language acquisition and reading methodology courses offered to primary-level preservice teachers should incorporate information on the more systematic and detailed approaches required to teach reading and writing to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R31]
- Teaching practice for preservice teachers at the primary and post-primary levels should include a placement with a trained learning support or special education teacher that involves programme planning and implementation at the individual student level. [R32]
- Educational psychology should be offered in Colleges of Education as a subject option in primary teacher education programmes leading to the B.Ed. degree. [R33]
- Preservice teacher education programmes at primary and post-primary levels should include input on Special Education, both integrated within general courses and as an area of study in itself, and attention should be given to ways in which class and subject teachers can identify and meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R34]
- The number of places on inservice courses for learning support and resource teachers should be increased to cater for recent and envisaged expansion of the learning support and resource teaching support services. [R35]
- In-career development courses for learning support and resource teachers dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and the planning and implementation of appropriate interventions should be provided as a matter of urgency. [R36]

- Intensive in-career development courses dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, differentiated teaching, and programme planning and implementation at the individual student level should be arranged for all class and subject teachers on an ongoing basis. [R37]
- Special schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, should be developed as resource centres for special class teachers and resource teachers working with students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia through the development of links with local Education Centres. [R38]

#### **4.10 Provision of Alternative Therapies**

In recent years, a number of complementary interventions that focus on the neurological and perceptual capacities of students with learning difficulties have been developed. These therapies aim to remediate or correct students' underpinning processing difficulties. Such interventions may be useful in alleviating the difficulties experienced by students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. To date, however, there is an absence of conclusive research findings to substantiate the effects of these interventions on the learning difficulties and achievements of students. The Task Force sees a need for a further, more detailed, review of the relevant research and a consideration of how various complementary interventions might operate in the Irish context.

The Task Force received submissions from a few parents who testified to the positive effects of alternative therapies, particularly when they were combined with educational interventions. Submissions were also received from providers of alternative therapies, who called for endorsement or validation of their methods. The submissions described neuro-developmental, sequential processing and sound therapies.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should commission a review of existing research on the effectiveness of therapies and interventions that have been designed to address the neurological and perceptual capacities of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R27]

#### **4.11 Provision of Services by Voluntary and Statutory Organisations Outside the School System**

The Task Force received information and submissions relating to the provision of services to students and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities by voluntary and statutory organisations outside the primary/post-primary school system. These included voluntary organisations providing assessment facilities and workshops for students with dyslexia, statutory organisations dealing with early school leavers and adults with literacy difficulties, and organisations and institutions involved in provision for students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, in the third-level sector.

Many submissions to the Task Force commented on the work of organisations in which parents and teachers co-operate on a voluntary basis to provide services that should be available in schools. Some of these organisations, which are part-funded by the Department of Education and Science, have developed substantial structures covering all parts of the country, and would be a useful resource to draw on in implementing policies related to learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

The Task Force noted the broad range of assessment and support services that has been provided for students with specific learning difficulties in third-level institutions through dedicated support from the Higher Education Authority.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should draw upon the expertise of approved and recognised voluntary organisations that provide assessment and teaching services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia as new initiatives designed to such difficulties are implemented. [R30]

## CHAPTER 5

### IDENTIFYING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ARISING FROM DYSLEXIA

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. It sets out a model for the assessment of such difficulties, beginning at age 3 and extending through formal schooling. The assessment model is underpinned by the following general principles:

- The purpose of assessment is to identify a child's learning needs and to make necessary adjustments to instruction;
- Informed teacher observation plays a crucial role in identifying children who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia;
- The early stages of assessment should be built on procedures outlined in the *Learning-Support Guidelines* ;
- A diagnostic test or a screening test for dyslexia should be administered if a learning difficulty emerges after formal reading instruction has begun;
- Parents should play a key role in the assessment of their child's learning difficulties, and in the implementation of appropriate interventions;
- Educational psychologists should play a key role in supporting class teachers/learning support teachers with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and the development of appropriate intervention strategies, before referral for psychological assessment is considered;
- The formal identification of dyslexia should occur only after the student has been provided with appropriate learning support for at least one year, and the student's response to that intervention has been documented and evaluated;
- The formal identification of dyslexia should involve a multi-disciplinary team, including the student's parents and teachers, the principal teacher, an educational psychologist and other relevant professionals
- The formal identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should recognise the degree of difficulty being experienced by the student
- At second-level, the needs and progress of each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team soon after school entry and annually thereafter, and appropriate recommendations should be made and implemented.

## 5.2 A Phased Process of Assessment

In this section, a four-phase model for the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is proposed. Each phase of the model is viewed as lying along a continuum. The suggested age ranges are approximate. It is envisaged that movement from one phase to the next will be governed by the student's progress in attaining learning targets that have been set in the context of the modified learning environment designed to address the student's learning needs. The overarching purpose of assessment at each stage in the model is to:

- identify the student's learning needs;
- make necessary adjustments to teaching;
- evaluate and record learning outcomes;
- determine the need for further assessment and intervention.

A key feature at each phase is the strong involvement of the student's parents and his/her class or subject teachers, as these play central roles in the student's development, and must support the implementation of any interventions that are needed.

The proposed model is summarised first, and then developed in more detail. Together, the four phases represent a continuum, while there is also a continuum within each phase.

1. *Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (3-5 years of age)*. If observation by the child's teacher and/or parents indicates that pre-reading/emergent literacy skills are not developing along expected lines, the child's learning difference (i.e., a marked difference between expected and observed development) should be noted and appropriate adjustments should be made to instruction. If adjusted learning targets are not achieved, Phase 2 should be implemented.
2. *Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (5-7 years)*. Once formal reading instruction has begun, teacher observation, evaluation of the outcomes of teaching, and, where necessary, screening and diagnostic testing, should be used to identify students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. If a student is deemed to be at risk, an appropriate individual learning programme should be developed and implemented by the class teacher and/or the learning support teacher. Where necessary, additional input on such matters as the interpretation of test results, programme planning, and monitoring of progress should be provided by an educational psychologist. If learning targets are not achieved, then Phase 3 should be implemented.
3. *Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Learning Needs (Ages 7-12)*. A multi-disciplinary team, including the student's class teacher, the learning support teacher, an educational psychologist, and the child's

parents/guardians should consider the student's learning strengths, his/her response to the instruction that has been provided to date, and the outcomes of any educational and psychological tests that have been administered. It is at this stage that a formal identification of dyslexia should be made, having regard to the student's needs and relevant criteria issued by the Department of Education and Science. The learning environment that is most appropriate to a student's needs should also be identified, and a detailed individual learning programme should be prepared (see Chapter 6). The next phase, Phase 4, is relevant for most students who were in receipt of special education provision in Phase 3.

4. *Annual Review of Learning Needs (12 years+)*. The learning needs of individuals who were assessed as having dyslexia should be formally reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team when the student has been accepted by a post-primary school. A formal review should occur on an annual basis thereafter. Since students (over age 12) may not manifest noticeable learning difficulties arising from dyslexia until relatively late in their development as readers and writers, these individuals should also be identified and their needs addressed.

### **5.2.1 Phase 1: Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (Ages 3-5)**

In the early stages of the child's development, when reading and writing skills are beginning to emerge (ages 3-5 years), and learning differences may manifest themselves, teachers and carers will need to monitor children's development carefully, and make appropriate adjustments as the need arises. Teachers working with young children may find it useful to record the outcomes of their observations using such tools as:

- checklists (see Table 5-1);
- curriculum profiles;
- teachers' own tests;
- informal notes of observed response;
- samples of children's own work;
- parents' observations and comments.

In addition, it may be desirable to administer more formal tests such as:

- pre-reading inventories that assess concepts of print;
- tests of early phonological skills.

**Table 5-1**  
**Indicators of a Possible Learning Difference (Ages 3-5 Years)**

Many of these indicators may also be noted in children with learning differences not arising from dyslexia.

- Is later than most children in learning to speak
- Has difficulty pronouncing some, especially multi-syllabic, words
- Has difficulty separating spoken words into sounds and blending spoken sounds to make words (i.e., has difficulty with phonological awareness)
- Experiences auditory discrimination problems
- Is prone to spoonerisms (eg., fips and chish for fish and chips)
- Has difficulty with rhyming
- Has difficulty maintaining rhythm
- Is unable to recall the right word
- Is slow to add new vocabulary
- Exhibits delays in acquiring emergent literacy skills (e.g., understanding that written language progresses from left to right, discriminating between letters, words and sentences)
- Experiences problems learning the alphabet
- Has trouble learning numbers, days of the week, colours and shapes
- Has trouble learning to write and spell his/her own name
- Is unable to follow multi-step directions or routines
- Is developing fine motor skills more slowly than other children
- May have difficulty telling and/or retelling a story in correct sequence.

If a marked difference between expected and observed development manifests itself in this early phase of learning to read, the class teacher should consult with the child's parents and with other professionals in the school and the community, to identify appropriate adjustments that need to be made to the child's learning programme at home and at school. In school settings, the learning-support (remedial) teacher will be an important source of information and support. In some cases, help with programme planning may be sought from an educational psychologist or from a speech and language therapist. Children who do not respond following appropriate adjustments may include those who are at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

A strong focus on prevention of learning problems between ages 3 and 5 may result in the identification of some 'false positives – children who may be identified as being at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexic and may not develop such difficulties over time. Nevertheless, it is possible to prevent or at least minimise the effects of learning difficulties by providing appropriate interventions at this stage. The main approach should be 'when in doubt act'.

To facilitate the involvement of parents in helping to identify learning differences, it is important to make general information about literacy development available to them. Such information could be provided in pre-schools, schools and health clinics in the form of short leaflets outlining key developmental milestones in literacy acquisition, and indicating to parents what they should expect at each milestone.

Another factor that is particularly relevant to this phase is class size. Quite clearly, teachers of very large reception classes might be unable to differentiate teaching in the manner proposed here, and maintain relevant documentation. Therefore, current Department of Education and Science policy, which favours relatively small reception classes, should be observed.

### **5.2.2 Phase 2: Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Ages 5-7 Onwards)**

As children move beyond the pre-reading/emergent literacy phase, and are exposed to more formal reading instruction (ages 5-7 years), some will continue to be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexic, while others may exhibit difficulties for the first time. It is important to identify these children at this phase so that appropriate intensive early intervention can be put in place. Such intervention typically involves establishing and addressing learning targets that reflect the student's areas of greatest need, and may include small-group or individual instruction. Research indicates that the vast majority of students whose learning difficulties are identified at an early stage can make considerable progress if intervention is timely and appropriate.<sup>65</sup>

The *Learning Support Guidelines* provide a model for the early identification and remediation of learning difficulties. This model can be extended to address the needs of all students with learning difficulties, including those arising from, dyslexia. This model emphasises the need for class teachers and learning support teachers to work co-operatively in addressing students' learning difficulties at this critical early stage. The following activities are proposed:

- Monitoring/observation/evaluation of the student's progress in the class reading programme;
- Diagnostic assessment by the class or learning-support teacher once low achievement or a learning problem had been identified;
- A review, by the class teacher and learning support teacher, of the outcomes of the diagnostic assessment, and any additional assessment information that is provided by the class teacher;
- Consideration of the most appropriate interventions for the student (i.e., intervention by the class teacher, provision of learning support by the learning support teacher; and/or intervention at home by parents);

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<sup>65</sup> e.g., Vellutino, F.R., Scanlon, D.M., & Lyon, R.G. (2000). Differentiating between Difficult-to-Remediate and Readily-Remediated Poor Readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 33, 223-238.

- Development of an individual learning programme by the learning-support teacher, in consultation with the class teacher and the student's parents. The programme should include measurable learning targets and the attainment of those targets should be reviewed at least twice a year;
- Involvement of the students' parents and class teacher in the assessment process and in the implementation of the child's learning targets.

The model is designed to accommodate the needs of all students with learning difficulties, including those at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. At this stage (Phase 2), it is proposed that intensive support (i.e., supplementary teaching) be provided by a learning support teacher for at least one year to students who are at risk. It is on the basis of the student's progress in Phase 2 that a decision may be taken to proceed to Phase 3, where a formal assessment of the student's learning difficulties and instructional needs is made by a multi-disciplinary team.

Diagnostic tests can be particularly useful to teachers in identifying students' learning strengths and weaknesses in various skills associated with acquiring literacy. One particular group of diagnostic tests – those that are designed to identify children who at risk for dyslexic difficulties – may be particularly useful. Among the skills and learning processes that are typically measured by such tests are:

- Letter name knowledge;
- Word reading;
- Non-word reading;
- Phonemic awareness (including alliteration, rhyming etc.);
- Naming speed;
- Phonics;
- Reading fluency;
- Spelling;
- Auditory verbal memory;
- Auditory discrimination;
- Motor skills.

In using and interpreting screening tests for dyslexia, the following points should be kept in mind:

- Each screening test is based on a particular view of what dyslexia is, and on how best to intervene in the child's learning;
- Screening tests differ from each other in terms of the skills and processes that are assessed;
- Few screening tests offer intervention programmes linked to test results;

- Screening tests will identify some children who are at-risk for dyslexia and who, subsequently, may not develop learning difficulties arising from dyslexia (false positives);
- Screening tests administered at 5-7 years will not pick up all children who are at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia (false negatives).

**Table 5-2**  
**Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia**  
**(Ages 5-7+)**

<p>Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other possible learning difficulties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds (alphabetic principle)</li> <li>• Has difficulty separating words into sounds, and blending sounds to form words (phonemic awareness)</li> <li>• Has difficulty repeating multi-syllabic words (e.g., <i>emeny</i> for <i>enemy</i>; <i>pasghetti</i> for <i>spaghetti</i>)</li> <li>• Has difficulty decoding single words (reading single words in isolation)</li> <li>• Has poor word-attack skills, especially for new words</li> <li>• Confuses small or 'easy' words: <i>at/to</i>; <i>said/and</i>; <i>does/goes</i>)</li> <li>• May make constant reading and spelling errors including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Letter reversals (e.g., <i>d</i> for <i>b</i> as in <i>dog</i> for <i>bog</i>)</li> <li>- Letter inversions (e.g., <i>m</i> for <i>w</i>)</li> <li>- Letter transpositions (e.g., <i>felt</i> and <i>left</i>)</li> <li>- Word reversals (e.g., <i>tip</i> for <i>pit</i>)</li> <li>- Word substitutions (e.g., <i>house</i> for <i>home</i>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reads slowly with little expression or fluency (oral reading is slow and laborious)</li> <li>• Has more difficulty with function words (e.g., <i>is</i>, <i>to</i>, <i>of</i>) than with content words (e.g., <i>cloud</i>, <i>run</i>, <i>yellow</i>)</li> <li>• May be slow to learn new skills, relying heavily on memorising without understanding</li> <li>• Reading comprehension is below expectation due to poor accuracy, fluency and speed</li> <li>• Reading comprehension is better than single-word reading</li> <li>• Listening comprehension is better than reading comprehension</li> <li>• Has trouble learning facts</li> <li>• Has difficulty planning or organising</li> <li>• Uses awkward pencil grip</li> <li>• Has slow and poor quality handwriting</li> <li>• Has trouble learning to tell the time on an analogue clock or watch</li> <li>• Has poor fine motor co-ordination</li> </ul>
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In interpreting the outcomes of such tests, care should be taken to separate judgements about 'at risk' learners from judgements involved in the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Care should also be exercised in making categorical statements about a child's neuro-psychological functioning based on the outcomes of a screening test.

Once a student has been identified as being at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and a suitable learning programme has been put in place (for example, additional support from the student's own teacher, or a combination of additional support), it will be necessary to continue to monitor the student's learning and to evaluate the overall effects of the programme. This can be accomplished if the class teacher and/or learning-support teacher:

- monitor the student's progress from day to day in such areas as phonological awareness, word recognition, spelling and reading accuracy, fluency, rate and comprehension of continuous prose;
- administer or re-administer appropriate diagnostic tests at the end of each instructional term;
- consult with other professionals and with the student's parents to obtain additional information about the student's learning needs and progress.

Since decisions about provision of supplementary teaching by a learning support teacher are made at the school level, it is not necessary to involve the Department of Education and Science or the National Educational Psychological Service Agency, though advice from a psychologist may be sought. Schools can take decisions regarding the duration and intensity of learning support, and can demonstrate flexibility in meeting the needs of students. However, as indicated in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, the provision of learning support places certain obligations on the school and on teachers in such areas as:

- provision of differentiated instruction;
- provision of one-to-one supplementary teaching, where needed;
- liaison with parents and with other professionals;
- programme planning at the individual student level;
- formal review of progress at least twice a year.

According to the *Learning Support Guidelines*, in selecting students for supplementary teaching, schools should give priority to students achieving at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on nationally standardised measures of reading achievement. In some cases, schools may not have the capacity to provide learning support to all the students who need it, particularly if one or more students require one-to-one learning support (supplementary teaching). As indicated in Chapter 4, it may be necessary to provide some schools with an additional learning support position, or additional learning support hours, if current resources do not meet students' learning needs.

### **5.2.3 Phase 3: Formal Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Needs (Ages 7-12 Onwards)**

While many students will respond positively to the adjusted class teaching and supplementary teaching that may be provided between the ages of 5 and 7 years, a small minority will continue to struggle because of their learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. A student who has not made adequate progress over a period of at least one year, despite having been provided with intensive learning support based on an appropriate individual learning programme, will need to have his/her progress and learning needs reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team that includes parents, class teacher, learning-support teacher, principal teacher (who should chair the team), educational psychologist and other relevant professionals. The purpose of this review is to examine the severity of the student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and his/her response to instruction, and to consider what future provision should be made.

The multi-disciplinary team's review of the student's progress and learning needs should be comprehensive and should include the following:

- a consideration of the outcomes of tests administered by the student's class teacher and/or learning support teacher, including the student's assessment profile;
- a review of the student's response to interventions that have been implemented by the class teacher, learning-support teacher and parents; the student's individual learning programme and progress records would be particularly important in this regard;<sup>66</sup>
- a consideration of the effects of the student's learning difficulty on his/her motivation and self-esteem;
- a consideration of the outcomes of any tests administered by the psychologist, including ability tests;
- a consideration of any other learning difficulties affecting the student's development.

An important element of the review is a consideration of the student's ability. As stated in Chapter 3, it is expected that this should consist of the student's full-scale IQ score, until such time as an appropriate, alternative measure of ability has been identified, and can be used in the identification process.

The outcomes of the review should result in:

- a determination of the severity of the student's learning difficulties, with reference to criteria provided by the Department of Education and Science;
- an indication of the level and intensity of the intervention that is desirable in the short-term;

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<sup>66</sup> The development of an Individual Profile and Learning Programme, and a Weekly Planning and Progress Record is outlined in the Department of Education and Science's *Learning-Support Guidelines*

- a determination of the student's ability to learn a language other than the first language;
- a recommendation relating to the nature and context of the instruction that should be provided and the expected duration;
- a determination of the involvement of other professionals;
- the development of a comprehensive individual learning programme;
- the determination of a date on which the student's progress will be reviewed.

**Table 5-3**  
**Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia**  
**(Ages 7-12+)**

Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.

- Has continued difficulty reading text aloud or silently
- Reading achievement is below expectation
- Still confuses letter sequences (e.g., *soiled* for *solid*; *left* for *felt*)
- Is slow at discerning and learning prefixes, suffixes, root words and other morphemes as part of reading and spelling strategies
- Poor reading accuracy, fluency, or speed interferes with reading comprehension
- Spelling is inappropriate for age and general ability (e.g., spelling the same word differently on the same page, use of bizarre spelling patterns, frequent letter omissions, additions and transposition)
- Poor spelling contributes to poor written expression (e.g., may avoid use of unfamiliar words)
- Uses avoidance tactics when asked to read orally or write
- Experiences language-related problems in maths (e.g., when reading word problems and directions, confuses numbers and symbols)
- Is unable to learn multiplication tables by rote
- Still confuses some directional words (e.g., left and right)
- Has slow or poor recall of facts
- Lacks understanding of other people's body language and facial expressions
- Has trouble with non-literal or figurative language (e.g., idioms, proverbs)
- Forgets to bring in or hand in homework
- Has difficulty remembering what day or month it is
- Has difficulty remembering his/her own telephone number or birthday
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

The nature of the provision that is recommended (e.g., learning support, resource teaching support, enrolment in a special class or school) depends on the severity of the student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and a consideration of the setting in which those difficulties can best be addressed.

#### **5.2.4 Phase 4: Annual Review of Learning Needs (Age 12 Onwards)**

This section proposes strategies for meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in post-primary schools.

*Recognised Difficulties Arising from Dyslexia.* Prior to a student's entry, representatives of the post-primary school (e.g. the head of first year and the learning support teacher) should liaise with the incoming student, his/her parents, and representatives of the feeder primary school to discuss the student's future educational needs and to receive the elements of the student's records that are deemed appropriate. This procedure is designed to help the transfer of students from primary to post-primary level and to ensure the continuity of appropriate provision.

For students who were identified in primary school as having a specific learning difficulty arising from dyslexia, there should be a formal, multi-disciplinary review of progress and learning needs on an annual basis. These reviews should involve the student's year-head, learning-support/resource teacher, guidance counsellor, an educational psychologist (if necessary), parents, and an advocate (if desired), and should result in the development of individual learning programme that addresses such issues as:

- the severity of the student's learning difficulties;
- how the student's current needs can best be met, through, for example:
  - provision of instruction in basic skills
  - development of study skills and examination techniques
  - reduction in number of subjects taken
  - provision and use of assistive technology;
- whether or not the student should be exempted from learning a language other than his/her first language;
- the modifications and accommodations that subject teachers need to make to ensure that the student has access to the curriculum in their subjects;
- the effect of the learning difficulty and any resulting under-achievement on the student's motivation and self-esteem, and proposals for building motivation and self-esteem;
- any accommodations that may need to be made in school and state examinations (with reference to current criteria;)
- any accommodations that need to be made in the home to address the student's learning difficulties;

**Table 5-4**  
**Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia**  
**(12 Years+)**

Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.

- Is still reading slowly and without fluency, with many inaccuracies
- Misreads words (e.g., hysterical for historical) or information
- Has difficulty modifying reading rate
- Has an inadequate store of knowledge due to lack of reading experience
- Continues to experience serious spelling difficulties
- Has slow, dysfluent and/or illegible handwriting
- Has better oral skills than written skills
- Has difficulty planning, sequencing and organising written text
- Has difficulty with written syntax or punctuation
- Has difficulty skimming, scanning and/or proof-reading written text
- Has trouble summarising or outlining
- Has problems in taking notes and copying from the board
- Procrastinates and/or avoids reading and writing tasks
- Does not complete assignments or class work or does not hand them in
- Is slow in answering questions, especially open-ended ones
- Has poor memorisation skills
- Still mispronounces or misuses some words
- Has problems recalling the names of some words or objects
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management skills
- Has more difficulty in language-based subjects (e.g., English, Irish, History) than in non-language based subjects (e.g., mathematics, technical graphics)
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

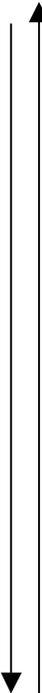
*Unrecognised Difficulties.* Post-primary schools need to be alert to the possibility that some students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may enter such schools before such difficulties have been formally identified. While such students may have received an appropriate education, there is an increased risk that their needs may not have been fully addressed. It is further noted that some students with dyslexia do not present with learning difficulties until their post-primary schooling begins. An early recognition system should be in place in all post-primary schools. This should consist of some or all of the following:

- Close liaison with feeder primary schools and transfer of primary records to post-primary schools;
- Information gathered from parents of incoming students;
- Achievement and ability testing prior to or on entry;
- Diagnostic testing for any student whose achievement is unexpectedly low relative to his/her ability.

If evidence of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia emerges there should be an assessment of the student's ability by a psychologist, and a formal, multi-disciplinary review of the student's learning needs, involving the psychologist, the student's year head, guidance counsellor, subject teachers (e.g., the English teacher) and learning support teacher. The review should examine the student's progress in school, and the outcomes of any tests that have been administered, including tests of achievement and ability, in the context of agreed identification criteria (see Chapter 4). If the review confirms that the student's difficulties are particularly severe, an individual educational plan should be prepared.

*(Production Note (Table 5-5) – place full table on single page.)*

**Table 5-5**  
**Continuum of Identification and Provision**



<b>Phase</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Main Persons Involved</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<i>1. Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (Ages 3-5: Pre-school/Junior Infants)</i>	Informal assessment by care-giver/ teacher; Input from parents; Identification of a marked <i>learning difference</i>	Child, Principal Teacher, Caregiver, Class Teacher, Parents/Guardians	Response to learning differences within child's own class; ' <i>Noticing and adjusting</i> '. Some differentiation of instruction; Recording of child's response to adjustments.
<i>2. Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Ages 5-7+: Infants/First Class)</i>	Formal and informal assessment; Diagnostic assessment to determine seriousness and persistence of student's <i>learning difficulties</i> ; Review of progress through regular assessment.	Student, Principal Teacher, Class Teacher, Learning-Support Teacher;. Parents/Guardians Educational Psychologist (for guidance and advice as needed)	Identification of students who are at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia; Provision of individual or small-group <i>differentiated instruction</i> by Class/Learning Support Teachers; Development and implementation of Individual Learning Programme and monitoring of outcomes, as per the <i>Learning Support Guidelines</i>

Note: The Model is intended to represent a continuum, with movement to the next phase (or back to an earlier phase) contingent on the student's progress in attaining targets that have been set.

**Table 5-5 (continued)**  
**Continuum of Identification and Support**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Main Persons Involved</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<i>3. Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Learning Needs (Ages: 7–12 years+: Second-Sixth Class)</i>	Liaison with feeder primary school; Gathering of assessment information; Multi-disciplinary review of child's difficulties and educational needs	Student, Principal Teacher, Class Teacher, Learning Support Teacher, Resource Teacher, Educational Psychologist (Assessment and advice) Parents/Guardians,	Statement on degree of severity of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia; Development of an Individual Learning Programme; Provision of intensive <i>differentiated instruction</i> in an appropriate setting depending on level of need (e.g., provision by resource teacher in own school, enrolment in a special class or school for students with specific learning disabilities). Consideration of need for special education services determined.
<i>4. Annual Review of Learning Needs (12 years +)</i>	Gathering of assessment information; Multi-disciplinary review of progress and learning needs	Multi-disciplinary Review Team including, for example, Year Head, Learning Support Teacher, Parents, Educational Psychologist (if necessary), Advocate (if desired), Guidance Counsellor	Initial review of needs and annual review of of progress based on available evidence; Consideration of severity of student's learning difficulties; development of individual learning programme, addressing, where relevant, need for assistive technology, exemption from study of Irish, and recommendations with regard to accommodations in state examinations

The Task Force recommends that:

- The identification of dyslexia should be based on the phased model outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, and should culminate in a review of the student's learning needs by a multi-disciplinary team drawing on the outcomes of ability and achievement tests, and information on the student's response to planned changes in his/her class and learning support programmes. [R9]
- For each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who is in receipt of learning support, the student's class teacher, learning support teacher, and parents should work jointly on the preparation of an individual learning programme designed to meet the student's needs, and should review its implementation at least twice a year, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*. [R49]
- Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents of students with dyslexia in the assessment of their child's learning needs, in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme and in making decisions on continuation/discontinuation of support services. [R40]
- Where special education provision is being considered for a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the student's class/subject teacher and learning support teacher should, along with parents and other relevant professionals, participate in the multi-disciplinary review of the student's learning needs, and should contribute to the development of the student's individual learning programme. [R53]

### **5.3 Matching Level of Support to Learning Needs**

An important principle underpinning the phased model of identification and provision (Table 5-5) is that the level of support provided to a student should match his/her learning needs. This implies that students with the greatest learning needs at a particular phase should receive the most intensive levels of support.

In Phase 1, where the emphasis is on identifying learning differences, and adjusting instruction for those children who exhibit such differences, intervention will be provided by the care-giver or class teacher who will 'notice' and 'adjust' teaching according to the child's emerging needs.

In Phase 2, by which time formal reading instruction has begun, students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are

identified, using a combination of teacher observation and diagnostic reading tests. In this phase, the students with the greatest difficulties may require supplementary teaching from a learning-support teacher, with advice being provided by a psychologist if required. Children with less severe difficulties may receive additional support from the class teacher, with, perhaps, advice from the learning support teacher or an educational psychologist. The level of support that a student receives throughout this phase will be linked to his/her response to the interventions that are provided, as learning targets are set and reviewed on a regular basis. Access to learning support may be governed by the criteria set down in the School Development Plan.

It is at Phase 3 that a formal identification of dyslexia may be made following a consideration of the student's achievement and abilities, and his/her response to interventions. The student's level of need, with respect to agreed criteria, will again dictate the nature and quantity of support that is provided. For students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, special education provision may be warranted. This may take the form of resource teaching, enrolment in a special class for students with specific learning difficulties in a mainstream school, or enrolment in a special school for students with specific learning difficulties.

For students in Phase 3 whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are not severe, or for whom placement in a special education setting is not desirable, supplementary teaching may be provided by a learning-support teacher, as outlined in Phase 2. Again, the level of support will be dictated by the student's needs. Students whose difficulties are quite severe may need intensive, one-to-one supplementary teaching. Others may work successfully in larger groups, with appropriate support from the class teacher and from their parents. Students whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are not severe may need additional support from their class teachers. Decisions relating to this matter can be taken without reference to circulars.

Finally, in Phase 4, when students will normally be attending a post-primary school, the level of support that is provided will again be linked to the student's learning needs, which should be reviewed on an annual basis. Students whose difficulties are very severe, and who were in receipt of special education services at primary level, may again be provided with intensive support at post-primary level, by a resource teacher, or a learning-support teacher, if such support is deemed to be warranted. Students with less severe difficulties may be provided with some additional instruction in areas linked to their needs – for example, organisational skills, study skills, and skills related to preparation for examinations.

#### 5.4 Record Keeping

A comprehensive assessment record should be maintained in respect of each student who is judged to be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, or who has been assessed as having such difficulties. In primary schools, this record will initially be maintained by the student's class teacher; and later on, by the learning support teacher, or by another teacher designated by the Principal Teacher. This record should be passed on to the student's post-primary school, and should be maintained there by a teacher designated by the principal teacher. The record is may take on added importance if, in the future, access to special education services and other provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are based on evidence from the school about the student's response to the instruction that has been provided.

When the student has learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, his/her record should include:

- Class teachers' reports on the student's progress in class, including the student's response to any modifications in instruction;
- Results of screening tests, diagnostic tests and other measures administered by the student's class and/or learning support teachers;
- Individual profiles and learning programmes prepared by the student's class and/or learning support teachers, including evidence on whether or not specified learning targets had been met;
- An individual educational plan, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, that specifies how the student's needs will be addressed in class, learning support and/or special education settings;
- Reports on psychological assessments;
- Student's work samples (writing samples etc.);
- Other relevant information.

At post-primary level, the student's record should include:

- A summary of the student's progress in primary school, including any interventions made to address his/her learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- Reports from subject teachers on the student's progress;
- An individual educational plan indicating the school's response to the student's learning difficulty (see Section 5.2.4, this chapter);
- Information on the status of the student with regard to exemptions from the study of Irish;
- Information on reasonable accommodations provided or sought for in-school and state certificate examinations;
- Work samples provided by the student, under examination conditions;
- Other relevant information.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The class/subject teachers and learning support teachers of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should maintain appropriate records on any formal or informal tests that have been administered, and on the students' responses to any interventions that have been put in place, with a view to making such information available to a multi-disciplinary review team as the need arises. [R52]

### **5.5 Development of Assessment Instruments**

A number of difficulties with the use of current assessment tools were referred to in submissions to the Task Force, or were pointed out by members of the Task Force. These difficulties include:

- no Irish norms for many of the test instruments in general use, including ability tests (such as the WISC-III battery) and individually administered tests of English reading;
- no recently developed standardised, norm-referenced tests of reading in Irish;
- no Gaeltacht norms for commonly used tests in English;
- lack of suitable tests for children of the travelling community seeking to access special education services for students with specific learning difficulties.

Given the importance of the principles of equity and non-discrimination in the provision of educational services, the Task Force recommends that the Department of Education and Science, in partnership with other relevant agencies, should commission the development of assessment instruments appropriate to the needs of students whose first language and/or main language of instruction is Irish so that learning difficulties experienced by these students can be identified and addressed on the same basis as students whose first language is English. The Task Force also holds the view that, in the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic society, the cultural appropriateness of testing materials in English for students with learning difficulties should be carefully considered, and some measure of flexibility introduced, lest these children be placed at a disadvantage in accessing the support they may need.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should commission the development of assessment and support materials in Irish so that the needs of students' whose first language is Irish can be effectively addressed. [R21]

- In the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic society, the Department of Education and Science should consider the cultural appropriateness of testing and teaching materials in English for students with learning difficulties. [R22]
- The Department of Education and Science should provide guidelines to learning support and resource teachers in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna on the language through which additional support should be given in those cases in which the language of the home is different from the language of the school. [R23]

### **5.6 Identification of Individuals with Dyslexia Outside the School System**

Several submissions to the Task Force raised the matter of the identification of individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia outside of the formal school system. These included individuals in programmes for early school leavers, students in third level institutions, and adults and prisoners in literacy programmes. Although the matter of identifying individuals with dyslexia outside of the school system did not fall under the terms of reference of the Task Force, it is the view of the Task Force that the general procedures outlined in this chapter can be applied to the identification of persons with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in non-school populations. The conclusion that an individual has learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be drawn after:

- appropriate diagnostic assessment has been conducted before and after implementation of an individual programme designed to address the learner's needs;
- the outcomes of instruction have been carefully monitored, including outcomes resulting from modifications to the learner's programme, in line with need;
- a formal review of the learner's progress and needs has been conducted by a team of experienced literacy instructors following implementation of an appropriate, intensive programme for a specified period of time.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL AND SYSTEM-LEVEL PROVISION

#### 6.1 Introduction

The Task Force examined a range of approaches and models designed to meet the needs of individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. There is little doubt that the scope and variety of approaches in the field are extensive. The approach taken by the Task Force was to identify characteristics of effective interventions that seemed relevant to the future development of provision and services for individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. The chapter elaborates on some of the issues addressed in earlier chapters including planning a whole-school approach to addressing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, providing an effective response to dyslexia in the classroom, developing individual learning programmes, and promoting parent involvement.

#### 6.2 Linking Provision to Developmental Needs

The most important characteristic of an effective intervention for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is that it is learner-centred. That is, it acknowledges the student's current developmental level, responds to the student's learning style, and takes into account his/her stage of development. To illustrate the importance of sensitivity to development, Table 6-1 provides examples of the different types of input that may be required by a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia at different phases of schooling. The emphasis in the early stages (3-5 years) is on prevention of learning difficulties through the provision of appropriate learning activities designed to develop a range of skills including phonological awareness, letter-name knowledge, cognitive processing skills and rhyming. When the student is between 5 and 7 years of age, and the work of the class teacher may, in some cases, be complemented by supplementary teaching delivered by a learning support teacher, the emphasis may focus more strongly on the development of word recognition and spelling skills, again taking into account the student's learning needs and strategies. These activities should be presented in a context of a balanced approach to reading, in which the child develops an enjoyment of reading as well as skill in areas of difficulty. At a later phase (between ages 7 and 12), the development of word reading and spelling skills may continue to be provided, but attention should also be given to comprehending and composing longer texts. As the student moves through the post-primary system, support may be continue to be provided with decoding, comprehension, and, particularly, spelling and punctuation, but attention may also be given to study skills, strategies for accessing subject knowledge through non-print materials, examination strategies, and reasonable accommodation in examinations.

There are many non-linguistic factors that may limit the capacity of a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia to cope with content and teaching methodologies. Interventions should take cognisance of associated difficulties

including the self-esteem of the learner, emotional development, peer relationships, attitude towards homework, and other educationally relevant circumstances. It is also important in planning interventions that the student's 'other life' is taken into account in terms of the home, the community (including involvement with language therapists and counsellors), sports and leisure facilities and life skills.

**Table 6-1**  
**A Continuum of Interventions**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Examples of Educational Content</b>
1. Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (3 – 5 years)	Prevention Activities designed to develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ auditory skills</li> <li>⇒ visual skills</li> <li>⇒ communication skills</li> <li>⇒ memory strategies</li> <li>⇒ language skills</li> <li>⇒ concepts about print</li> <li>⇒ phonological awareness</li> <li>⇒ letter name knowledge</li> <li>⇒ sequencing skills</li> <li>⇒ cognitive and perceptual processing</li> <li>⇒ co-ordination of sensory inputs</li> </ul>
2. Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (5 - 7 years+)	A focus on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ segmenting spoken words into phonemes</li> <li>⇒ identifying letter-sound correspondences and blending sounds</li> <li>⇒ developing a basic sight vocabulary</li> <li>⇒ developing word recognition skills</li> <li>⇒ spelling</li> <li>⇒ developing vocabulary</li> <li>⇒ developing syntax</li> <li>⇒ handwriting</li> <li>⇒ developing an enjoyment of books and reading</li> <li>⇒ all elements of encoding and decoding written words</li> </ul>

**Table 6-1 (contd.)  
A Continuum of Interventions**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Examples of Educational Content</b>
3. Formal Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Learning Needs (7 – 12 years+)	<p>In addition to the above interventions, which focus on extending word recognition, spelling and punctuation, intervention programmes should where necessary focus a range of text level skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ fluency</li> <li>⇒ speed (reading rate)</li> <li>⇒ comprehension</li> <li>⇒ flexible reading approaches</li> <li>⇒ composing</li> <li>⇒ editing and revising.</li> </ul> <p>At this stage the concepts of <i>reading to learn</i> and inclusive compensatory strategies should be introduced.</p>
4. Annual Review of Learning Needs (12-18 years+)	<p>The focus of interventions at this phase of development should continue to focus on decoding, spelling/punctuation and writing but should be extended to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ self-regulated learning skills</li> <li>⇒ study skills</li> <li>⇒ note taking</li> <li>⇒ exam strategies</li> <li>⇒ occupational exploration (career guidance)</li> <li>⇒ accessing subject knowledge/skills</li> <li>⇒ reasonable accommodation in class and in exams</li> </ul> <p>In some cases strategies designed to encourage and assist the student in staying at school will be required.</p>
Non-school Interventions (e.g., early school leavers)	<p>In the event that persons with dyslexia have opted to move from the formal education system into informal networks or alternative options provided by the other Government Departments, interventions need to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ socially important literacy and numeracy skills</li> <li>⇒ occupationally relevant reading and writing</li> <li>⇒ occupational exploration</li> <li>⇒ lifestyle restructuring</li> </ul>

### **6.3 Planning and Implementing a Whole-School Approach**

This section deals with the development of school-level initiatives designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia that vary in severity. First, strategies for addressing these needs in the context of school planning are proposed. Then the roles of the school principal and of class/subject and learning support in creating an appropriate school environment for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia (the 'dyslexic-friendly' school) are outlined.

#### **6.3.1 School Development Planning**

The Education Act 1998 requires the Board of Management of each school to make arrangements for the development of a school plan, through a process of consultation involving parents, staff and students of the school. It is desirable that schools, in formulating the special educational needs aspect of their plan, take into account the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including those with severe difficulties. The principal should ensure that all staff members are aware of the issues involved, and that effective use is made of the resources that are available to the school. In line with general guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science for school development planning,<sup>67, 68, 69</sup> the plan should indicate short-term and medium-term goals for the school in relation to addressing the needs of students with dyslexia, and should indicate strategies and procedures for:

- preventing learning difficulties ;
- identifying learning difficulties as early as possible;
- using teaching as a basis for initial assessment and intervention;
- maintaining school records on student learning outcomes;
- assessing and reporting on student learning outcomes;
- making reasonable accommodations for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- accessing remedial/learning support services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who need such services;
- consulting and liaising with professionals outside the school (e.g., psychologists) on matters relating to the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- distributing responsibility among the staff for matters relating to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including assessment, record keeping, liaison with professionals outside of the school;
- involving parents in decisions relating to learning needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;

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<sup>67</sup> Department of Education and Science. (1999). *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>68</sup> Department of Education and Science. (1999). *School Development Planning for Second Level Schools*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>69</sup> Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning-Support Guidelines*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

- making arrangements for the professional development of staff members on matters relating to learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia.

It is also recommended that each school identify in its school plan a named teacher who would be responsible for co-ordinating services for students with special educational needs, including those whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are severe. The duties of this named teacher would be to co-ordinate the provision of services for students with special needs at the school level, to liaise with professionals outside of the school, and to establish links between primary and post-primary schools to ensure a smooth transition for students with learning difficulties between the two settings.

### **6.3.2 Effective School Leadership**

The principal teacher plays a key role in creating a learning environment in which students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia can develop. This role includes advising the Board of Management and parents and encouraging the teaching staff. The principal teacher impacts at policy and practical levels throughout the school by:

- promoting a 'dyslexia friendly' culture and ethos;
- disseminating inclusive principles;
- facilitating staff development;
- engaging parents in decision-making ;
- advocating adequate resources;
- leading the development of a whole school plan;
- co-ordinating in-school resources;
- raising awareness of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia as a whole school issue;
- discussing provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia at staff meetings;
- allocating responsibility for co-ordinating the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia to staff members with expertise in the area;
- ensuring that individual learning programmes are developed for all students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- ensuring co-ordination between teachers, where more than one teacher is responsible for meeting the needs of a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- ensuring that, when a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia transfers to another school, appropriate information about the student's progress and learning needs is made available to the student's new school.

Suggestions for providing leadership in the area of learning support provision are given in the *Learning Support Guidelines*. These include the dissemination of the

*Guidelines* themselves in schools, and providing appropriate opportunities for teachers to become familiar with them.

### **6.3.3 Involvement of Class and Subject Teachers**

The involvement of class and subject teachers in addressing students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is a key element in the implementation of an effective whole-school approach. Following the suggestions put forward in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, it is recommended that teachers should:

- assume major responsibility for addressing the learning needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, whether or not these students are in receipt of supplementary teaching from a learning support or resource teacher;
- develop an awareness of the difficulties encountered by students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and the learning needs of these students;
- provide differentiated instruction to students who have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- liaise with learning support teachers, psychologists and other professionals on such matters as assessment, programme planning and implementation, and review of progress;
- liaise with parents by providing advice and support on dealing with their child's learning difficulties at home.

### **6.3.4 Involvement of Learning Support Teachers**

It is envisaged that learning-support teachers would play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in the schools in which they provide a service. Again, following on the suggestions put forward in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, it is recommended that learning support teachers should:

- liaise with and support class teachers in addressing the learning needs of students in their classes who have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- develop a diagnostic profile and learning programme in respect of each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia for whom learning support is being provided;
- involve the student's class teacher and parents in the development and implementation of the student's programme
- ascertain, on a regular basis, whether agreed learning targets have been achieved, and modify instruction accordingly;
- review provision of learning support at regular intervals, usually twice a year;
- if the student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia persist, participate in a multi-disciplinary review to formally identify dyslexia and address what additional support should be provided to meet the student's needs.

### **6.3.5 Recommendations on Planning and Implementing a Whole-School Approach**

The Task Force recommends that:

- Each primary and post-primary school should incorporate into its School Development Plan whole-school procedures and strategies for identifying and addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R39]
- Each primary and post-primary school should identify in the School Development Plan a named teacher with responsibility for the co-ordination of services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and other special needs. This teacher's duties should include the maintenance of records, liaison with parents and with professionals outside the school, liaison between the students' teachers, and the maintenance of links between students' primary and post-primary schools. In large schools with several special classes, this may entail the appointment of a co-ordinator on half-time or full-time basis. [R41]
- Schools should monitor the effectiveness of interventions that are put in place to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, in the context of developing and evaluating implementation of the School Development Plan. [R44]
- Where possible, schools should ensure continuity in the development of expertise and of support services by allocating the same teachers to learning support/resource teaching duties for a period of several years. [R45]
- Class and subject teachers should assume major responsibility for the progress and development of each student in their classes with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, with other teachers and professionals assuming supporting roles. [R47]
- Class and subject teachers should play a central role in the identification of students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, in planning and implementing appropriate adjustments to instruction, and in communicating relevant information to parents and to other professionals. [R48]
- For each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who is in receipt of learning support, the student's class teacher, learning support teacher, and parents should work jointly on the preparation of an individual learning programme designed to meet the student's needs, and should

review its implementation at least twice a year, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*. [R49]

- In addition to participating in appropriate in-career development courses provided by the Department of Education and Science, or by their schools, class and learning support teachers should familiarise themselves with strategies for identifying learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and for providing appropriate support. [R50]
- Learning support teachers should play a proactive role in advising and collaborating with class/subject teachers to co-ordinate class and supplementary teaching programmes for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. [R51]

#### **6.4 Developing, Implementing and Reviewing Individual Learning Programmes**

Some students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may receive supplementary teaching from a learning-support or resource teacher. A key strategy in ensuring that these students enjoy the benefits of an integrated learning programme that allows their learning difficulties to be addressed in a systematic manner at home, in the classroom, and in the learning support setting (where relevant) is the development and implementation of an individual learning programme. The development and implementation of such a programme is also relevant in the context of the proposed assessment model outlined in Chapter 5, in which attention is given to the outcomes of any interventions put in place by the school in assessing the student's learning needs..

The *Learning-Support Guidelines* provide some broad guidelines on how an individual learning programme can be developed, and how it can be used to ensure consistency in targets and methodologies in the student's class and learning support settings. The individual learning programme, which should be updated at the end of each instructional term (every four to six months), should include:

- an indication of the student's strengths and weaknesses in such areas as language and scholastic skills, social/emotional development, behavioural and life skills;
- a list of learning targets for the student that have been agreed by the class teacher, learning-support teacher and student's parents, based on the student's assessed learning needs (with involvement by the student, as appropriate);
- an indication of how the learning targets will be achieved in the student's regular class, learning-support setting, and home;
- an indication of any additional materials and programmes required to achieve the agreed targets;
- the proposed duration of the programme, and a review date;

- involvement of the student in setting targets and monitoring progress;
- use of materials appropriate to the age, interests and needs of the student;
- provision of opportunities for the student to work independently;

If it is determined at a multi-disciplinary meeting that a student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are so severe that special education provision is warranted, the programme, which should follow through with the student from year to year, should also include:

- a description of the student's learning needs and an indication of how best they can be met should be provided following each review (e.g., additional support from the class/subject teacher, resource teaching);
- the modifications and accommodations that need to be made in the classroom and in school assessments, and, where relevant, in state certification examinations;
- the status of the student in relation to exemption from Irish;
- a statement on the effect of the learning difficulty on the student's self-esteem and motivation, and an indication of how any social/emotional problems that have developed can be addressed;
- an indication of any additional resources that are needed, including assistive technology, and how these resources can be accessed and their use co-ordinated.

The Task Force recommends that:

- Each primary school should ensure that all teachers are familiar with the *Learning Support Guidelines* and should begin the process of implementing them in such areas as identification of learning difficulties and programme planning, implementation and review. [R42]

## **6.5 Providing an Effective Response to Dyslexia in the Classroom**

Class and subject teachers will need to provide a range of accommodations for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including those with severe difficulties. The particular accommodations that should be provided will depend on the needs of individuals and groups of students, taking into account the nature and severity of their learning difficulties. The teacher may need to:

- Provide individual and small-group teaching as needed;
- Provide opportunities for the student for re-learn and over-learn rules and strategies;
- Provide instruction in reading/spelling that is structured, sequential and cumulative;
- Provide regular constructive feedback to maintain motivational levels and enhance self-esteem;
- Identify how best the student learns, and adapt teaching methods to suit the student's learning style;

- Where possible, use a multi-sensory approach to teaching word reading and spelling that involves listening, saying, looking at, and writing words in various combinations;
- Ensure that learning materials are at the student's reading level, and that they also encourage discovery learning;
- Evaluate the student's understanding of text using oral rather than written questions;
- Provide a learning environment that is quiet and non-distracting;
- Introduce cursive handwriting from as early a stage as possible to aid spelling, speed, neatness and continuity;
- Focus on the nature of a student's writing errors (quality) rather than the number of errors (quantity);
- Expect the student's work to be erratic and inconsistent at times;
- Encourage the student to repeat the directions for completing a task;
- Provide assistance with elements of the writing process, such as the use of planning sheets and editing checklists;
- Introduce and reinforce the use of meta-cognitive strategies (for example, cue cards) that enable the student to exercise control over his/her learning processes;
- Provide support through the appropriate use of Information and Communication Technologies.

The following practices should be avoided:

- Asking the student to read aloud in class, unless s/he wishes to do so and s/he has practiced in advance;
- Asking the student to copy large amounts of material from the blackboard;
- Penalising the student for not completing tasks within strict time limits;
- Marking or signalling too many obvious spelling errors in student's written work;
- Asking the student to rewrite work because of spelling errors;
- Comparing a student's written work unfavourably with that of other students;
- Asking a student to copy out corrections several times rather than discussing with the student the nature of his/her errors, and providing an opportunity for memorising the correct word.

In classes in post-primary schools in particular, accommodations such as the following may be needed for students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia:

- use of non-printed learning materials, including taped books;
- compensatory strategies and/or assistance with note taking (for example, providing another student's notes);
- use of new media, including multi-media, to learn and review content;
- use of assistive technology, including use of a word processor with spellchecker;

- teaching of self-regulated learning skills, including study skills, to enable students to learn content independently.

It is important that the in-career development of class and subject teachers address the effective implementation of these accommodations.

## 6.6 Providing Effective Reading Instruction

Schools should provide reading instruction that is developmentally appropriate and sensitive to the needs of individual students. The revised English Language Curriculum for primary schools<sup>70</sup> has highlighted a number of areas that need to be attended to in providing beginning reading instruction including:

- the degree of emphasis that should be placed on oral language development;
- the age at which formal reading instruction should begin, which is linked to the student's level of language development and phonological awareness;
- the development of prerequisite skills such as concepts of print, and some phonological awareness skills before formal instruction begins;<sup>71</sup>
- the development of a range of word identification skills including phonic skills;
- implementation of strategies for linking the teaching of reading and writing in the early stages;
- development of comprehension strategies such as setting goals for reading, monitoring whether or not reading makes sense, and linking prior knowledge and experience to text information;
- procedures for monitoring the student's reading accuracy and reading rate on a regular basis;
- strategies for encouraging the student to read some books independently;
- procedures for supporting the development of reading strategies at home;
- procedures for making reading an interesting and pleasurable activity for the student.

To address students' learning difficulties effectively, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of individual differences and variation in reading development, and to discriminate between a developmental delay in learning to read and difficulties arising from dyslexia.

As students progress beyond the early stages of learning to read, increased attention should be allocated to helping students to acquire functional reading skills and strategies, not only in English (or Irish) classes, but throughout the curriculum. Strategies such as the following should be applied with consistency in

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<sup>70</sup> Ireland. (1999). *English Language Curriculum. Teacher Guidelines*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

a broad range of texts, including informational texts, documents, multiple texts (different texts on the same topic) and electronic texts:

- activating background knowledge;
- imaging or visualising texts;
- identifying word meanings using information about context and word structure;
- identifying the structures found in narrative and informational texts;
- identifying important information (such as the theme or main idea) in texts;
- summarising texts;
- comparing and contrasting ideas in a text;
- monitoring (assessing) one's own comprehension and taking appropriate steps if comprehension breaks down;
- applying study strategies such as retrieving information;
- reflecting on the content of texts;
- evaluating ideas.

### **6.7 Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

Considerable progress has been made in recent years in the development of Information and Communication Technologies. Among the most relevant functions for students with dyslexia are:

- Information management – student tracking systems and electronic individual programmes;
- Assessment – a number of ICT-based assessment tools have been developed which need to be formally evaluated;
- Remediation/learning support – computerised instruction in literacy skills and training in key cognitive and perceptual processes;
- Curriculum Access – assistive devices to enhance encoding and decoding of text and to increase access to the curriculum;
- Enhanced learning opportunities in subject specific knowledge.

The main types of ICT products of use to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are:

- Hand-held spellcheckers and electronic dictionaries ;
- Tape recorders, Dictaphones, Books on Tape, Recorded classes, lectures, curriculum texts on tape;
- Hand-held organisers;
- Computers
  - Word Processors, which enable editing etc,;
  - Reading programmes, which allow texts to be read aloud;
  - Art programmes, which may be helpful in developing hand-eye co-ordination;

- Voice recognition software, which allows for dictation of text directly to the computer;
- Scanners, which allow printed/hand written texts to be scanned on to a computer so that the text is available for word processing or as part of a reading programme.

In June 2000, the Department of Education and Science issued a grant of £700 to schools with a learning-support or resource teacher post for the purchase of ICTs (hardware and/or software). Where a learning support/resource post was shared by several schools, the grant was paid to the base school. Schools with more than one learning-support/resource teacher received a grant of £700 in respect of each teacher. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) provided schools with advice on how to use the grant to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and learning disabilities.<sup>72</sup> In December 2000, the Minister for Education and Science announced a £2 million initiative involving the delivery of laptop computers to students with dyslexia and other reading and writing difficulties in 31 post-primary schools. The purpose of the initiative, which is being overseen by the NCTE, is to explore ways in which ICTs can assist students with learning difficulties to work independently within mainstream classes.

Students with specific learning difficulties may also access assistive technology through the Aids and Appliances Grant from the Department of Health and Children, or through local Health Boards. Parents who purchase equipment themselves can obtain a refund on value-added tax (VAT).<sup>73</sup>

Even in contexts where sufficient resources are made available to purchase assistive technology, however, a number of issues still need to be addressed:

- The training of teachers and learners in the effective use of technologies;
- The quality of available technologies;
- The maintenance and up-grading of hardware and software.

It is envisaged that the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) will provide more extensive advice and assistance to schools in implementing technologies for students with special educational needs, including those with severe difficulties arising from dyslexia. Already some progress on this has been made through the development of a section on special education on Scoilnet, the NCTE website for schools.

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<sup>72</sup> Phelan, A., & Haughey, E. (2000). *Information and Advice on Special Educational Needs and Information and Communications Technology*. Dublin: National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE).

<sup>73</sup> The appropriate form is Form VAT61A – Claim to Repayment of Value Added Tax Chargeable on Aids and Appliances for Use by Disabled Persons.

### **Case Study: Use of Technology**

Tom, who has a specific learning difficulty, recently transferred to a second level school. In sixth class in primary school, Tom was provided with a text reader system (scanner and software) by the Department of Education and Science. This he used extensively to access and read novels that far exceeded his reading age, to read history and geography textbooks, to read problem-solving questions in his mathematics textbook, and to read his class textbook in English. In addition, Tom was provided by the Department with a voice recognition device which he used to record his answers to questions in his comprehension workbook, English reader, or history and geography text books, and to record his attempts at creative writing. While both hardware and software worked reasonably well, there were difficulties in reading mathematical symbols, and Tom had to withdraw from his classroom in order to use the voice recognition device because the microphone was very sensitive to background noise.

A review of Tom's needs when he transferred to post-primary school resulted in a recommendation that he be provided with a portable laptop computer, a portable scanner, a headset which would enable him to work in his own class, regardless of the noise level, and a software package that would enable him to record information in specialised areas such as science. The resource teacher appointed to work with Tom in his post-primary school has helped to co-ordinate the use of the technology.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The National Centre for Technology in Education, in the context of its work in the area of special needs and the development of Scoilnet, should be provided with resources to advise and support teachers on the use of software and assistive technology designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and should make up-to-date information on dyslexia available to teachers on its website. [R60]
- Grants or tax relief should be available to parents of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who purchase assistive technology for their children, where such technology has been recommended by an accredited expert (for example, a psychologist). [R61]

## **6.8 Promoting Parental Involvement**

As indicated in Chapter 1, the involvement of parents is central to meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. The most appropriate approach acknowledges that the parents of students with such difficulties need support and advice but that they also have a major contribution to make in achieving effective outcomes.

Parents of a child with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may require:

- Appropriate support when initial concerns are expressed;
- Access to relevant information;
- Counselling and advice;
- The support of other parents;
- Access to appropriate services and assessments;
- An understanding of the role and function of interventions;
- Access to an appeals procedure;
- Ongoing contact with class/subject teachers, the learning-support teacher, and, where sanctioned, the resource teacher, so that programmes and progress can be discussed and parents can be enabled to support their child's learning.

The contributions of parents can include:

- Playing a support role to the learner;
- Protecting the self-esteem of the learner;
- Rewarding effort rather than results;
- Contributing to multi-disciplinary reviews of the child's progress and needs;
- Contributing to the development of the School Development Plan;
- Re-appraising targets with the learner;
- Following up and reinforcing learning objectives;
- Advocating better resources;
- Engaging in activities such as paired reading;
- Providing help with the use of assistive devices;
- Meeting with the child's teachers on a regular basis;
- Becoming involved in after-school activities.

The submissions to the Task Force by parents provided ample evidence of the difficulties encountered by parents in attempting to access services for children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. It is hoped that implementation of the recommendations in this report will address many of the difficulties and frustrations evident in their submissions.

The Task Force recommends that:

- Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents in all aspects of its response to meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including the development, implementation and evaluation of relevant parts of the School Development Plan. [R40]
- Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in the assessment of their child's learning needs, in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme and in making decisions on continuation/discontinuation of support services. [R43]

### **6.9 Raising Awareness about Dyslexia**

Access to reliable and relevant information for teachers and parents is a fundamental requirement of a system that is effective in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Promoting awareness amongst professionals and the general population about such difficulties can help to create a more positive societal response.

Awareness-raising activities should include:

- The publication of easy-access guides, which should be made available to schools and libraries;
- The publication of posters indicating useful contact points;
- Development of a web site.

The objectives of awareness raising are:

- To promote positive attitude to change;
- To raise sensitivity to early indicators of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- To improve professional response to parents;
- To combat misconceptions;
- To provide information about support organisations and information services.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should ensure that information and advice are readily available to parents/guardians of children with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, through the development of appropriate printed and electronic materials and through the distribution of such materials through schools. [R1]

### **6.10 Establishment of An Appeals Procedure**

An important component of an effective response to dyslexia is the development of a formal procedure that will allow parents to express their concerns about the way in which their child's learning needs are being addressed. Clearly, for each phase in the model of identification and intervention proposed in this report, procedures need to be implemented that will allow parents to appeal decisions relevant to addressing their child's learning needs. Indeed, many of the parents who made submissions to the Task Force expressed concerns about the way in which the educational system failed to respond to their child's learning needs.

Some of the concerns expressed by parents can and should be addressed at the school level. A meeting with an interested and responsive class/subject teacher or learning support teacher can do much to assure parents that their child's learning needs are being addressed, and to involve them in addressing those needs. Indeed, the *Learning Support Guidelines* outline strategies for the involvement of parents in the assessment of their child's learning difficulties and in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme

Parents who participate as members of a multi-disciplinary team assembled to formally identify a child's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and and/or to review a child's learning needs, will have an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have with the child's teachers and other relevant professionals. However, parents who are dissatisfied with the outcomes of the team's deliberations may wish to lodge a formal appeal with an appropriate body. Similarly, parents who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to such matters as accommodations for their child in state examinations may also wish lodge a formal appeal.

The Task Force Recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should establish an independent procedure to deal with appeals instigated by parents of children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who are dissatisfied with the response of the system to their children's needs. [R17]

### **6.11 Designing In-career Development for Teachers**

Recommendations for the in-career development of teachers need to address both the skills and knowledge of the class teacher as well as those of learning support and resource teachers. The suggestions provided below are intended for illustrative purposes and are not comprehensive.

With regard to class teachers, the following elements should be included in any initial or continuing teacher education programme:

- Identifying students at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- Modifying classroom instruction to address students' difficulties;
- Implementing curriculum-based assessment and recording outcomes;
- Administering and interpreting the outcomes of screening and diagnostic tests;
- Identifying learning styles and compensatory strategies;
- Providing multi-sensory teaching in reading and spelling;
- Teaching self-regulatory strategies;
- Responding to the needs of parents;
- Providing appropriate support in the classroom;
- Engaging in individualised planning;
- Providing differentiated teaching, based on students' learning needs;
- Fostering self-esteem;
- Providing an optimal learning environment;
- Organising knowledge in non-linear (diagrammatic) formats;
- Teaching study skills;
- Appraising progress in relation to specified learning targets.

Programmes for learning support and resource teachers who deal with the learning needs of students with more serious learning difficulties arising from dyslexia need to focus on:

- Prevention of learning difficulties;
- The nature and severity of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- Aetiology and causation;
- Identification and assessment;
- Life-span issues and transition;
- Developing an individual learning programme;
- Working with a multi-disciplinary team;
- Accessing and using appropriate teaching materials;
- Advising class and subject teachers on responding appropriately to students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in the classroom;
- Implementing multi-sensory teaching strategies;
- Building on a student's learning strengths;
- Evaluating learning interventions;
- Evaluating complementary interventions.

### **6.12 Monitoring Quality and Evaluating Programme Effectiveness**

Programme evaluation is important in ensuring that the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are being adequately met, and that resources are used effectively. The Task Force envisages that three groups will be actively involved in relation to school-level programme evaluation: schools themselves, the National Educational Psychological Service, and the

inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science. The views of parents and of students will also need to be ascertained as part of the evaluation process.

The evaluation of interventions by schools themselves will be important in the context of developing and evaluating the School Development Plan. A procedure for school self-review is included in the Department of Education and Science publication, *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools*, which can be applied to evaluating provision and programmes in schools for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia as well as other learning difficulties. The evaluation should involve the Board of Management, teachers, parents, and, where appropriate, students themselves. Feedback on school self-review should be shared within the school community and should guide the development of subsequent school planning, and the development of prevention and intervention programmes.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the Task Force envisages that the National Educational Psychological Service will assist schools in evaluating the effectiveness of particular interventions such as early identification of learning difficulties and the design and implementation of individual learning programmes. It is envisaged that members of the inspectorate, in the context of their work on whole-school evaluation, will monitor the development of whole-school strategies to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, as well as the adequacy of provision for individual students with such difficulties. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the Department will be involved on an ongoing basis in monitoring the work of special classes and special schools for students with specific learning difficulties.

### **6.13 Co-ordinating National Resources**

One of the commitments of the Strategic Management Initiative<sup>74</sup> is that when an issue is clearly the responsibility of more than one government department, inter-departmental co-operation will be activated. The issue of addressing the needs of students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia may have implications for more than one government department. It is important in these circumstances that an inter-departmental committee considers how the needs of individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in different educational and non-educational settings can be addressed in a co-ordinated manner. The inter-departmental committee should be led by the Department of Education and Science, and should include representatives from the Departments of Enterprise and Employment, Health and Children, Social, Community and Family Affairs, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Finance. A major goal of this committee should be to ensure that administrative and professional boundaries do not hamper the delivery of appropriate services to

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<sup>74</sup> E.g., Public Service Management Act, 1997.

individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including individuals with severe difficulties.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should initiate the setting up of an inter-departmental committee that includes the representatives of the Departments of Enterprise and Employment, Health and Children, Social, Community and Family Affairs, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Finance to ensure that the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are addressed in a co-ordinated manner and that administrative and professional boundaries do not hamper the delivery of appropriate services. [R29]

## CHAPTER 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

Throughout this report, recommendations of the Task Force for the development of services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia were put forward. The recommendations can be grouped into four broad categories:

- (i) recommendations on developments at the system level (mainly the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science);
- (ii) recommendations on the professional development of teachers at the pre-service and in-career levels;
- (iii) recommendations on ways in which schools and teachers might address the needs of students' learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- (iv) recommendations on ways in which other organisations and agencies can provide services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including those with special education needs.

Within each of these categories, the Task Force identified short-term and medium-term recommendations. The short-term recommendations should be implemented within the next school year, while the medium-term recommendations should be implemented within three years. In many cases, the Task Force's medium-term recommendations are contingent upon other proposals for the future development of the educational system – including the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service Agency, the proposed establishment of a National Support Service for Special Education, a stronger focus on early identification of learning difficulties in schools, and the implementation of the new *Learning-Support Guidelines*.

The Task Force recognises that, while many of the recommendations made here refer to meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, they also have relevance for meeting the needs of students with a broad range of other learning difficulties and disabilities. Conversely, the implementation of improved provision for all students with learning difficulties and disabilities, such as the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service Agency and the establishment of a National Support Service for Special Education, should benefit students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

The Task Force recognises that a systematic approach to implementing the recommendations in this report needs to be adopted, since implementation of some recommendations (e.g., the involvement of class/subject teachers in planning, implementing and reviewing the individual learning programmes of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia) depends on the prior

implementation of other recommendations (e.g., the involvement of class/subject teachers and learning support teachers in appropriate in-career professional development activities).

The Task Force expects that the Department of Education and Science will appoint a body to review implementation of its recommendations in three to four years time.

## **7.2 Recommendations – System Level**

### ***Provision of Information and Advice***

*In the short term*

- 1) The Department of Education and Science should ensure that information and advice are readily available to parents/guardians of children with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, through the development of appropriate printed and electronic materials and through the distribution of such materials through schools.

### ***Resource Teaching, Special Classes and Special Schools for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties***

*In the short term*

- 2) In the absence of equitable access, and contingent on the outcomes of relevant research, the Department of Education and Science should develop a strategic plan for the establishment of additional special classes in mainstream primary schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including difficulties arising from dyslexia.
- 3) The number of resource hours sanctioned for primary-level students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia, should, where necessary, exceed the current limit of 2.5 hours per week.
- 4) A pupil-teacher ratio of 9:1 or equivalent should be implemented in special classes in mainstream primary schools and in special schools for students with specific learning difficulties including those arising from dyslexia.
- 5) Special needs assistants should be assigned to special classes and special schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, on a needs' basis so that teachers can better plan and implement programmes that address students' individual learning needs.

- 6) Enrolment of students in special classes or special schools for students with specific learning difficulties should be extended beyond the current limit of two years if, following a formal review of progress, a third year is deemed necessary.
- 7) A systematic approach to managing the transition to a mainstream school should be implemented in the case of each student with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who has completed a period of enrolment in a special school or special class in a designated school, and should involve liaison between the student's special class/school teacher and the teachers in the mainstream school.

### ***Identification of Dyslexia***

#### *In the short term*

- 8) In consultation with relevant bodies, including the National Educational Psychological Service, the Department of Education and Science should review and amalgamate current circulars dealing with the identification of specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, to remove inconsistencies between circulars, and to incorporate the phased model of identification and other changes recommended in this report.
- 9) The identification of dyslexia should be based on the phased model of identification outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, and should culminate in a review of the student's learning needs by a multi-disciplinary team drawing on the outcomes of ability and achievement tests, and on information on the student's response to planned changes in his/her class and learning support programmes.

#### *In the medium term*

- 10) Emerging perspectives on the identification of specific learning difficulties, including current discrepancy-based models, should be kept under review, and should be adopted as appropriate.

### ***Development of the Learning Support Services***

#### *In the short term*

- 11) In order to better meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the Department of Education and Science should expedite implementation of its *Learning Support Guidelines*, including the

provision by a learning support teacher of intensive supplementary teaching to no more than 30 students in any instructional term.

- 12) The Department of Education and Science should support primary and post-primary schools in providing a level of learning support that is flexible and appropriate to the needs of each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Where necessary, intervention should include one-to-one teaching from a learning support teacher.
- 13) Where the learning support service in a primary or post-primary school cannot meet the needs of all students with very low achievement and/or learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the Department of Education and Science should allocate additional learning-support hours on a temporary or permanent basis in accordance with identified needs.
- 14) The Department of Education and Science should appoint a national learning-support co-ordinator and 50 regional learning-support advisors to provide to provide schools and learning-support teachers at the primary and post-primary levels with advice and support.
- 15) The Department of Education and Science should sanction learning support posts on a needs basis in recognised private post-primary schools, thereby enabling recognised learning support teachers in such schools to attend in-career development courses in learning support sanctioned by the Department.
- 16) No more than four to five schools should constitute a cluster for the purpose of creating and/or maintaining learning support positions.

### ***Establishment of an Appeals Procedure***

#### *In the short term*

- 17) The Department of Education and Science should establish an independent procedure to deal with appeals instigated by parents of children with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who are dissatisfied with the response of the system to their children's needs.

### ***Provision of Reasonable Accommodations in State Certificate Examinations***

#### *In the short term*

- 18) In light of recent equality legislation, the Department of Education and Science should refer to the Director of Equality and the National Disability Authority the practice of appending explanatory notes to the certificates of candidates with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, who are granted certain accommodations in state examinations.

#### *In the medium term*

- 19) The Department of Education and Science should examine a range of accommodations that might be offered to all students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in state examinations, including the provision of test papers with enlarged print, and the option of listening to the examination questions on tape.
- 20) The Department of Education and Science should inform examination candidates with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia, at least six months beforehand whether their applications for reasonable accommodations have been successful so that schools can be supported in providing appropriate preparation and training.

### ***Development of Assessment and Support Materials in Irish and in Other Languages***

#### *In the short term*

- 21) The Department of Education and Science should commission the development of assessment and support materials in Irish so that the needs of students whose first language is Irish can be effectively addressed.

#### *In the medium term*

- 22) In the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic society, the Department of Education and Science should consider the cultural appropriateness of testing and teaching materials in English for students with learning difficulties.
- 23) The Department of Education and Science should provide guidelines to learning support and resource teachers in Gaeltacht schools and

Gaelscoileanna on the language through which additional support should be given to students with learning difficulties in those cases in which the language of the home is different from the language of the school.

### ***Monitoring the Operation and Effectiveness of Support Services and Interventions***

#### *In the short term*

- 24) The inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science should, as provided for in the Education Act 1998, monitor and report on the implementation by schools of strategies designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, including learning support and special education services.
- 25) The Department of Education and Science should commission a study to compare the relative effectiveness and appropriateness to the needs of individual students and their parents of the three models of special education provision that are in place for primary-level students with specific learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia – resource teaching support, enrolment in a special class, and enrolment in a special school.

#### *In the medium term*

- 26) The Department of Education and Science should commission a study on the operation and effectiveness of the learning-support and resource-teaching services in post-primary schools, including the nature of provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.
- 27) The Department of Education and Science should commission a review of existing research on the effectiveness of therapies and interventions that have been designed to address the neurological and perceptual capacities of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.
- 28) The Department of Education and Science should arrange for the maintenance of a database of students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, who are in receipt of special education services in primary and post-primary schools.

### ***Establishment of Inter-departmental Committee***

#### *In the medium term*

- 29) The Department of Education and Science should initiate the setting up of an inter-departmental committee that includes the representatives of the Departments of Enterprise and Employment, Health and Children, Social, Community and Family Affairs, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and Finance to ensure that the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are addressed in a co-ordinated manner and that administrative and professional boundaries do not hamper the delivery of appropriate services.

### ***Involvement of Voluntary Organisations***

#### *In the short term*

- 30) The Department of Education and Science should draw upon the expertise of approved and recognised voluntary organisations that provide assessment and teaching services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia as new initiatives designed to such difficulties are implemented.

## **7.3 Recommendations – Preservice Teacher Education**

### ***Provision in Preservice Teacher Education Programmes***

#### *In the medium term*

- 31) The language acquisition and reading methodology courses offered to primary-level preservice teachers should incorporate information on the more systematic and detailed approaches required to teach reading and writing to students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.
- 32) Teaching practice for preservice teachers at the primary and post-primary levels should include a placement with a trained learning support or special education teacher that involves programme planning and implementation at the individual student level.
- 33) Educational psychology should be offered in Colleges of Education as a subject option in primary teacher education programmes leading to the B.Ed. degree.

- 34) Preservice teacher education programmes at primary and post-primary levels should include input on Special Education Needs, both integrated within general courses and as an area of study in itself, and attention should be given to ways in which class and subject teachers can identify and meet the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

#### **7.4 Recommendations – In-career Professional Development of Teachers**

##### ***Courses for Class/Subject, Learning Support and Resource Teachers***

###### *In the short term*

- 35) The number of places on inservice courses for learning support and resource teachers should be increased to cater for recent and envisaged expansion of the learning support and resource teaching support services.
- 36) In-career development courses for learning support and resource teachers dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and the planning and implementation of appropriate interventions should be provided as a matter of urgency.

###### *In the medium term*

- 37) Intensive in-career development courses dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, differentiated teaching, and programme planning and implementation at the individual student level should be arranged for all class and subject teachers on an ongoing basis.
- 38) Special schools for students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, should be developed as resource centres for special class teachers and resource teachers working with students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, through the development of links with local Education Centres.

## 7.5 Recommendations – School/Local Level

### ***Development and Implementation of the Aspects of the School Plan Dealing with Students' with Learning Difficulties***

#### *In the short term*

- 39) Each primary and post-primary school should incorporate into its School Development Plan whole-school procedures and strategies for identifying and addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.
- 40) Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in the assessment of their child's learning needs, in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme and in making decisions on continuation/discontinuation of support services.
- 41) Each primary and post-primary school should identify in the School Development Plan a named teacher with responsibility for the co-ordination of services for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and other special needs. This teacher's duties should include the maintenance of records, liaison with parents and with professionals outside the school, liaison between the students' teachers, and the maintenance of links between students' primary and post-primary schools. In large schools with several special classes, this may entail the appointment of a co-ordinator on half-time or full-time basis.
- 42) Each primary school should ensure that all teachers are familiar with the *Learning Support Guidelines* and should begin the process of implementing them in such areas as identification of learning difficulties and programme planning, implementation and review.
- 43) Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in the assessment of their child's learning needs, in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme and in making decisions on continuation/discontinuation of support services.

*In the medium term*

- 44) Schools should monitor the effectiveness of interventions that are put in place to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, in the context of developing and evaluating implementation of the School Development Plan.
- 45) Where possible, schools should ensure continuity in the development of expertise and of support services by allocating the same teachers to learning support/resource teaching duties for a period of several years.
- 46) Where a student cannot study a subject because of a specific learning difficulty arising from dyslexia (for example, Gaeilge), schools should make appropriate alternative arrangements.

## **7.6 Recommendations – Class Level**

### ***Implementation of Appropriate Provision by Class/Subject and Learning Support Teachers***

*In the short term*

- 47) Class and subject teachers should assume major responsibility for the progress and development of each student in their classes with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, with other teachers and professionals assuming supporting roles.
- 48) Class and subject teachers should play a central role in the identification of students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, in planning and implementing appropriate adjustments to instruction, and in communicating relevant information to parents and to other professionals.
- 49) For each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who is in receipt of learning support, the student's class teacher, learning support teacher, and parents should work jointly on the preparation of an individual learning programme designed to meet the student's needs, and should review its implementation at least twice a year, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*.
- 50) In addition to participating in appropriate in-career development courses provided by the Department of Education and Science, or by their schools, class and learning support teachers should familiarise themselves with strategies for identifying learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and for providing appropriate support.

- 51) Learning support teachers should play a proactive role in advising and collaborating with class/subject teachers to co-ordinate class and supplementary teaching programmes for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

*In the medium term*

- 52) The class/subject teachers and learning support teachers of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should maintain appropriate records on any formal or informal tests that have been administered, and on the students' responses to any interventions that have been put in place, with a view to making such information available to a multi-disciplinary review team as the need arises.
- 53) Where special education provision is being considered for a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the student's class/subject teacher and learning support teacher should, along with parents and other relevant professionals, participate in the multi-disciplinary review of the student's learning needs, and should contribute to the development of the student's individual learning programme.

## **7.7 Recommendations – Other Service Providers**

### ***Psychological Services***

*In the short term*

- 54) The number of third-level places for the post-graduate training of educational psychologists should be increased in line with projected national needs and the projected needs of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).
- 55) The current demand for psychological assessments should be dealt with during the next school year by, for example, providing schools with the funding needed to have the assessments completed by contract psychologists acting in accordance with guidelines provided by the National Educational Psychological Service.
- 56) The Minister for Education and Science should liaise with the Minister for Health and Children to co-ordinate the transition period as psychological services come to be provided by the National Educational Psychological

Service rather than by psychologists under the aegis of Health Boards and/or voluntary bodies.

- 57) The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science, provide all schools with guidelines on procedures for identifying students who may have learning difficulties arising from dyslexia or may be at risk of developing such difficulties.

*In the medium term*

- 58) The National Educational Psychological Service should, in consultation with parents and teachers, assess the psychological needs of students, advise schools on policies and strategies for those with special educational needs, and assist collaboratively in the creation of a school environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning which students may experience.
- 59) The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be provided with resources to (i) advise schools on such matters as implementing screening and early identification programmes and programme planning; (ii) support students, parents and teachers in addressing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia; (iii) contribute to the continuing professional development of staff members in a school; and (iv) assist in monitoring the effectiveness of interventions implemented in the school.

**Technology**

*In the short term*

- 60) The National Centre for Technology in Education, in the context of its work in the area of special needs and the development of Scoilnet, should be provided with resources to advise and support teachers on the use of software and assistive technology designed to address the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and should make up-to-date information on dyslexia available to teachers on its website.
- 61) Grants or tax relief should be available to parents of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who purchase assistive technology for their children, where such technology has been recommended by an accredited expert (for example, a psychologist).

## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF TASK FORCE ON DYSLEXIA**  
**(SPECIAL READING DISABILITY)**

Having regard to the responsibility of the State to make adequate educational provision for all children with special needs, including children with Dyslexia (Specific Reading Disability).

Having regard to the distinct educational needs of certain children with Specific Reading Disability.

Having regard to the State's commitment to ensuring that the special educational needs of children with Specific Reading Disability are properly addressed within the education system.

Having regard to the range of special education provision and support services already made available to children with specific reading disability in special schools, special classes attached to ordinary schools; and in integrated settings, and

Having regard to the desirability of ensuring that the services made available to children with specific reading disability reflect best international practice.

The task force on specific reading disability will:

- Review the current range of educational provision and support services available to children with specific reading disability in Ireland;
- Assess the adequacy of current educational provision and support services, having regard to the range of special needs which can arise and the need to address such needs either in integrated settings or by way of special dedicated provision;
- Make such recommendations as are considered appropriate for the development or adjustment of existing policy approaches, educational provision and support services, in order to ensure the delivery of an appropriate, effective and efficient education service to children with Specific Reading Disability;
- Make such further recommendations as the Task Force considers appropriate in relation to the above matters.

## **GRÚPA OIBRE AR DISCLÉICSE (Sain-éagumas Léitheoireachta)**

Ta grúpa oibre curtha ar bun ag an Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta, An Dr Michael Woods, TD., chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an soláthar oideachais atá ar fáil do pháistí in Éirinn go bhfuil discléicse (sain-éagumas léitheoireachta) ag cur isteach orthu.

Tá sé mar chúram ar an ngrúpa oibre:

- Athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an soláthar oideachais agus ar na seirbhísí tacaíochta atá ar fáil faoi láthair do pháistí in Éirinn go bhfuil sain-éagumas léitheoireachta ag cur isteach orthu;
- Oiriúnacht an tsoláthair oideachais agus na seirbhísí tacaíochta atá ar fáil faoi láthair a mheas, ag cur san áireamh an réimh leathan de riachtanais speisialta atá í gceist agus an gá atá ann chun freastal ar na riachtanais seo i súimh atá comhtháite nó tri sholáthar sainiúil, speisialta a chur ar fáil;
- Moltaí a dhéanamh a mheastar a bheith feiliúnach chun forbairt nó athchóiriú a dhéanamh ar na polasaithe, ar an soláthar oideachais agus ar na seirbhísí tacaíochta atá ann faoi láthair chun a chinntiú go gcuirfear seirbhis oideachais a bheidh oiriúnach, éifeachtach agus feidhmiúil ar fáil do pháistí go bhfuil sain-éagumas léitheoireachta ag cur isteach orthu;
- Moltaí eile a dhéanamh a mheasann an grúpa oibre a bheith cuí i dtaca leis na hábair thuasluaite.

## APPENDIX B

### INDICATORS OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES INCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO DYSLEXIA

The characteristics listed below are often associated with dyslexia, as well as a variety of other learning difficulties. Those not observable at one age may, of course, appear at a later stage. Such characteristics identified at any age should be addressed. The presence of a number of them suggests that the child should be considered at risk of developing learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature. It should be noted that these difficulties may exist alongside abilities in the areas of creativity or in high verbal skills.

- A. ***Indicators of a Possible Learning Difference (Age 3-5 Years).*** *Many of these indicators may also be noted in children with learning difficulties not arising from dyslexia.*
- Is later than most children in learning to speak
  - Has difficulty pronouncing some, especially multi-syllabic, words
  - Has difficulty separating spoken words into sounds and blending spoken sounds to make words (i.e., has difficulty with phonological awareness)
  - Experiences auditory discrimination problems
  - Is prone to spoonerisms (eg., fips and chish for fish and chips)
  - Has difficulty with rhyming
  - Has difficulty maintaining rhythm
  - Is unable to recall the right word
  - Is slow to add new vocabulary
  - Exhibits delays in acquiring emergent literacy skills (e.g., understanding that written language progresses from left to right, discriminating between letters, words and sentences)
  - Experiences problems learning the alphabet
  - Has trouble learning numbers, days of the week, colours and shapes
  - Has trouble learning to write and spell his/her own name
  - Is unable to follow multi-step directions or routines
  - Is developing fine motor skills more slowly than other children
  - May have difficulty telling and/or retelling a story in the correct sequence

**B. Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Ages 5-7 Years+).** *Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.*

- Is slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds (alphabetic principle)
- Has difficulty separating words into sounds, and blending sounds to form words (phonemic awareness)
- Has difficulty repeating multi-syllabic words (e.g., *emeny* for *enemy*; *pasghetti* for *spaghetti*)
- Has difficulty decoding single words (reading single words in isolation)
- Has poor word-attack skills, especially for new words
- Confuses small or 'easy' words: *at/to*; *said/and*; *does/goes*)
- May make constant reading and spelling errors including:
  - Letter reversals (e.g., *d* for *b* as in *dog* for *bog*)
  - Letter inversions (e.g., *m* for *w*)
  - Letter transpositions (e.g., *felt* and *left*)
  - Word reversals (e.g., *tip* for *pit*)
  - Word substitutions – *house* for *home*
- Reads slowly with little expression or fluency (oral reading is slow and laborious)
- Has more difficulty with function words (e.g., *is*, *to*, *of*) than with content words (e.g., *cloud*, *run*, *yellow*)
- May be slow to learn new skills, relying heavily on memorising without understanding
- Reading comprehension is below expectation due to poor accuracy, fluency and speed
- Reading comprehension is better than single-word reading
- Listening comprehension is better than reading comprehension
- Has trouble learning facts
- Has difficulty planning or organising
- Uses awkward pencil grip
- Has slow and poor quality handwriting
- Has trouble learning to tell the time on an analogue clock or watch
- Has poor fine motor co-ordination

**C. Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Ages 7-12 Years+).** *Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.*

- Has continued difficulty reading text aloud or silently
- Reading achievement is below expectation
- Still confuses letter sequences (e.g., *soiled* for *solid*; *left* for *felt*)
- Is slow at discerning and learning prefixes, suffixes, root words and other morphemes as part of reading and spelling strategies
- Poor reading accuracy, fluency, or speed interferes with reading comprehension
- Spelling is inappropriate for age and general ability (e.g., spelling the same word differently on the same page, use of bizarre spelling patterns, frequent letter omissions, additions and transposition)
- Poor spelling contributes to poor written expression (e.g., may avoid use of unfamiliar words)
- Uses avoidance tactics when asked to read orally or write
- Experiences language-related problems in maths (e.g., when reading word problems and directions, confuses numbers and symbols)
- Is unable to learn multiplication tables by rote
- Still confuses some directional words (e.g., left and right)
- Has slow or poor recall of facts
- Lacks understanding of other people's body language and facial expressions
- Has trouble with non-literal or figurative language (e.g., idioms, proverbs)
- Forgets to bring in or hand in homework
- Has difficulty remembering what day or month it is
- Has difficulty remembering his/her own telephone number or birthday
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

D. **Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Age 12 years+).** *Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.*

- Is still reading slowly and without fluency, with many inaccuracies
- Misreads words (e.g., hysterical for historical) or information
- Has difficulty modifying reading rate
- Has an inadequate store of knowledge due to lack of reading experience
- Continues to experience serious spelling difficulties
- Has slow, dysfluent and/or illegible handwriting
- Has better oral skills than written skills
- Has difficulty planning, sequencing and organising written text
- Has difficulty with written syntax or punctuation
- Has difficulty skimming, scanning and/or proof-reading written text
- Has trouble summarising or outlining
- Has problems in taking notes and copying from the board
- Procrastinates and/or avoids reading and writing tasks
- Does not complete assignments or class work or does not hand them in
- Is slow in answering questions, especially open-ended ones
- Has poor memorisation skills
- Still mispronounces or misuses some words
- Has problems recalling the names of some words or objects
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management skills
- Has more difficulty in language-based subjects (e.g., English, Irish, History) than in non-language based subjects (e.g., mathematics, technical graphics)
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

## APPENDIX C

### SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS OF THE TASK FORCE ON DSYLEXIA – PLENARY SESSIONS

#### **2000:**

5<sup>th</sup> October  
12<sup>th</sup> October  
24<sup>th</sup> October  
8<sup>th</sup> November  
24<sup>th</sup> November  
7<sup>th</sup> December  
8<sup>th</sup> December

#### **2001:**

4<sup>th</sup> January  
5<sup>th</sup> January  
24<sup>th</sup> January  
30<sup>th</sup> January  
9<sup>th</sup> February  
27<sup>th</sup> February  
20<sup>th</sup> March  
29<sup>th</sup> March  
9<sup>th</sup> April  
10<sup>th</sup> April

## APPENDIX D

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE PROGRAMMES FOR SCHOOLS IN DESIGNATED AREAS OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

The following programmes for primary schools are supported by the Department of Education and Science:

- *Disadvantaged Area Schools Scheme* – Some 316 schools qualify by inclusion in this scheme covering a school population of 72,957 students. There are 293 over-quota teaching posts in 250 of these schools. A maximum class size of 29 students applies in such schools and an additional £30 per student capitation grant is payable (i.e., a grant of £94 per capita). The additional £30 is broken down as follows: £16 supplementary capitation for general running costs; £9 for classroom materials and equipment; and £5 for home/school community liaison activities. Schools in the scheme also receive a refund of their television licence fee and a 95% building grant for building projects. A special payment may be made to assist schools encountering serious financial difficulty.
- *Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme* – All 316 schools in the Disadvantage Area Schools scheme have the services of a Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator who provides co-operation and collaboration between home, school and community.
- *Breaking the Cycle* – A five-year pilot project aimed at large-scale urban disadvantage and at rural and dispersed disadvantage. The project operates in 32 urban schools in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway, and in 122 schools in rural areas, which are organised into 25 clusters, with support from 25 co-ordinators. In the urban areas, a student teacher ratio of 15:1 operates for the first four years of primary school. Grant aid is provided in both urban and rural areas and targeted in-career development for teachers is a feature of this scheme. Co-ordinators have been appointed to support the development of the programme in selected schools.
- *8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative* – This initiative which started in 1998 is substantially EU funded and seeks to tackle problems related to early school leaving in the 8 to 15 year age group with a special focus on assisting students to make a smooth transition from primary to post-primary schooling and facilitating a return to school for those who have left early. Forty-eight primary schools and twenty-nine post-primary schools are involved in 17 projects. Research into the characteristics of those who are at risk of leaving early is an aspect of the project.
- *The New Disadvantage Initiative* – This programme, announced in January 2001, will run over a three-year period, and involves the creation of 204 new primary teaching posts and the allocation of cash grants to primary schools in respect of disadvantaged students. As part of the

programme, 89 urban schools will benefit from an additional 150 teaching posts, while 319 rural schools will be allocated the services of local teacher/coordinators, while 2,276 schools will be paid additional per capita grants based on the number of disadvantaged students they serve.

The following programmes for post-primary schools are supported by the Department of Education and Science:

- *Disadvantage Area Schools Scheme* – This scheme operates on the same principle as the primary scheme and involves the provision of additional support to schools in disadvantaged areas. Schools in the scheme receive enhanced capitation grants for equipment and resources and an additional grant for home/school liaison initiatives. Schools also are allocated an additional over quota teaching post for remedial purposes and for home/school links. There are 190 teaching posts of this nature in 211 designated post-primary schools.
- *Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme* – This scheme is organised and operates on the same basis as the primary school scheme. A recent extension of the scheme has resulted in an increase in the number of schools participating to 211.
- *Stay in School Initiative* – This initiative aims to increase the number of students staying on in school to complete the full senior cycle programme. It is operating in the 117 post-primary schools under the guidance of two national co-ordinators.

**APPENDIX E**  
**PROVISION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE FOR**  
**TRAVELLER CHILDREN**

As of January 2001, there were 465 Resource Teachers for Traveller posts catering for 427 schools, while three special schools also catered for traveller children. In addition, there were 51 pre-schools for travellers.

At second level, there were 32.16 whole time equivalent (WTE)<sup>75</sup> posts for traveller children in secondary schools, 29.99 WTE posts in vocational schools, and 9.26 WTE posts in community and comprehensive schools.

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<sup>75</sup> A whole-time equivalent post is regarded as 22 teaching hours per week.

## **APPENDIX F THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS**

At its first meeting, the Task Force decided to engage in a process of public consultation to ascertain the views and the recommendations of the public at large and of key groups and organisations on the matter of dyslexia. To this end an advertisement was placed in the national newspapers setting out the terms of reference of the Task Force and inviting written submissions.

As a follow-on to this it was decided to write to key groups and organisations enclosing a copy of the advertisement with a view to eliciting responses/submissions. The groups and organisations contacted were: Vocational Education Committees (33), Education Centres (23), Education Co-ordinators in Partnership Programmes (38), National Parents' Councils (2), National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres and Community Workshops (FÁS).

As a result of this consultation process, a total of 399 written submissions were received (See Appendix G). All of these submissions were considered by the Task Force during its deliberations and were taken into account when recommendations were being formulated.

The Task Force recognised that some individuals with specific reading/writing difficulties might experience problems dealing with a written advertisement in the newspapers and formulating a written response. In order to tap into the views of this group, which, it was felt, would be of particular value and relevance to the work of the Task Force, a short advertisement was carried on Radio 1 for a period of seven days and free-phone access to a comment line was put in place for a period of eleven days to receive oral comments and responses. Researchers on programmes on Radio 1 and Radio 2 (FM) which focus on interaction with the general public ('chat shows') were contacted with a view to alerting the listening public to the fact that a comment line with the freephone access had been set up. A total of 896 oral submissions were made. These were integrated with those received through the written submission process. An additional feature of many of the oral submissions was a direct request for information or assistance, with many persons leaving contact phone numbers or addresses.

## APPENDIX G

### LISTS OF INDIVIDUALS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS MAKING SUBMISSIONS TO THE TASK FORCE

#### G.1 Individual Submissions

1. Acton, Clare
2. Alcorn, Bernice
3. Alvey, Arlene
4. Anderson, Margaret
5. Aughey, Elaine
6. Battle, Michael & Marion
7. Beattie, Shona
8. Behan, Patrick & Rose
9. Beirne, Claire
10. Bell, Daphne
11. Bell, Elaine
12. Bennett, Elizabeth
13. Blackmore, Margaret
14. Bonner, Senator Enda
15. Boyle, Noreen
16. Brady, Colm J
17. Brasil, H
18. Breen, J
19. Brennan, Catherine
20. Breslin, Pauline
21. Briody, Patricia
22. Brislane, Jack & Mary
23. Bryan, Derek
24. Burns, Eimear
25. Butler, Hilary
26. Byrne, Anne
27. Byrne, Catherine/Craig, Tom
28. Byrne, Deborah
29. Campion, Catherine & Paul
30. Carlin, Teresa
31. Carney, Dr. Patrick & Caitriona
32. Carr, E
33. Carr, Elizabeth
34. Carroll, Maria
35. Carroll, Teresa
36. Cartron, Christine
37. Cassidy, Margaret
38. Cauldwell, Mary & John
39. Chaplin, Geraldine

40. Clarke, Susan
41. Colleran, Mary V
42. Conaty, Francis J
43. Connolly, Bridie
44. Connolly, Tony & Joan
45. Cooney, Garreth
46. Corcoran, Annette
47. Corrigan, Ciara
48. Corrigan, Shirley
49. Cosgrove, Frank & Carmel
50. Costigan, Máiréad
51. Courtney, Dr. M.B
52. Coyne, Mrs. Martha
53. Cross, Mary
54. Crossan, Anne
55. Crowe-O'Neill, Rosaleen
56. Cullinane, Ml.
57. Curlis, Lill
58. Cuthbert, Mary
59. Daly, Annamarie
60. Davin, Sheila
61. Davitt, Dolly
62. Deegan, Mary
63. Delaney, Carmel & Michael
64. Denham, Niall
65. Desmond, Maria
66. Desmond, Pat
67. Donald-Joyce, Anne
68. Donnelly, Ada
69. Dooley-Martyn, Caroline
70. Doran, Anne
71. Doyle, Carmel & Peter
72. Doyle, Eamonn
73. Doyle, Lorraine
74. Doyle, Margaret
75. Doyle, Maura
76. Doyle, Pat
77. Doyle, Sinéad
78. Doyle, Thérèse
79. Drakeford, Suzanne & Alan
80. Dunne, John & Bridget
81. Dunne, John James
82. Dunne, Maura
83. Dwyer, Jane
84. Egan, Ann
85. Eiffe, Paula & Paul

86. Fallon, Christopher
87. Farrell, Mary
88. Farrell, Mary
89. Faughnan, Helen
90. Fay-Kelly, Máiréad
91. Feeney, Bernadette
92. Fenelon, Anna
93. Fennelly, Florence
94. Field, Philomena
95. Fitzgerald, Eileen
96. Flanagan, June
97. Flinter, Anna
98. Flood, Roisín
99. Flynn, Maeve
100. Foley, Robert & Aileen
101. Foran, Carol
102. Forde-Gilmartin, Pauline
103. Fox, Bernie.
104. Galewood, P.J.
105. Gallagher, Collette
106. Gallagher, Mary & Patrick
107. Gannon, Lucy
108. Gestsson, Mary
109. Gildea, Eileen
110. Giles, Pat
111. Gilhooly, Mary
112. Gillen, Michael
113. Glass, Beatrice
114. Gleeson, Anne
115. Gough, Dairín
116. Green, Bridget
117. Greene, Cora
118. Hackett, John Paul.
119. Hackett , Margaret.
120. Hand, Patricia.
121. Hanratty, Bernard
122. Harley, Veronica
123. Harpur, Andree
124. Harpur, Bridget
125. Hartnett, Stephanie
126. Hayden, Betty & Jimmy
127. Hayes Tuite, Gerardine
128. Hayes, Sean & Lucy
129. Henry, Mary
130. Heslin, Pauline
131. Higgins, Eileen & Joseph

132. Hill, Evelyn
133. Holden, Patty
134. Houlihan, Isabel
135. Hoyne, Margaret
136. Hunter, Valerie
137. Joy, Una
138. Kavanagh, Deirdre,
139. Kavanagh, Patricia & Anthony
140. Kavanagh, Rosemary
141. Kavanagh-Bracken, Annette
142. Kehoe, Margaret
143. Kelly, Martin, Patricia & Glenn
144. Kelly, Mary
145. Kennedy, Patricia
146. Kenny, Phil
147. Kenny, Simone
148. Kilbride, George
149. Killian, Nick
150. Kirwan, Martin
151. Kirwan, Sarah
152. Knowles, S.
153. Lalor, Bernie
154. Lang, Edel
155. Lawless, Denise
156. Lawless, Gabrielle
157. Lee, Aine
158. Lehane, Terry
159. Lenehan, Mary
160. Maher, Marie
161. Malone, Anne & Tom
162. Matthews, Brian & Lorraine
163. Mc Carey, Mary
164. Mc Carry, Caroline & Kevin
165. Mc Carthy, Enid
166. Mc Cormack, Jacqueline and Stephen
167. Mc Cormack, W.
168. Mc Donnell, Nuala
169. Mc Gahern, Anna
170. Mc Gahern, Sean & Una
171. Mc Gill, Kevina
172. Mc Ginley, Mary
173. Mc Gowan, Bernadette & Sean
174. Mc Gowan, Una
175. Mc Grath, Margaret
176. Mc Grath, Theresa
177. Mc Grogan, Catherine

178. Mc Guigan, Mary
179. Mc Hugh, Emma
180. Mc Hugh, Margaret
181. Mc Kenna, Anne
182. Mc Kenna, Gerard & Majella
183. Mc Leod, Aileen & Ian,
184. Mc Loughlin, Ann
185. Mc Mahon, Kathleen
186. Mc Mahon, Teresa
187. Mc Nama, Kitty & Michael
188. Mc Namara, Martin & Shirley
189. Mc Namara, Martina
190. Mc Nean, Irene
191. Mc Nulty, Mary & Joe
192. Melly, Mary
193. Moan, Eileen
194. Molan, Tim
195. Molloy, Lilian
196. Monaghan, Carmel & Pat
197. Montague, Kate
198. Mooney, Geraldine
199. Moore, Mary
200. Moran, Brigid M.
201. Muldoon, David & Caitriona
202. Mulligan, Mary
203. Murphy, Barbara
204. Murphy, Elizabeth
205. Murphy, Jackie & Paul
206. Murphy, Mary
207. Ní Chonghaile, Peigí
208. Nolan, Anne
209. O'Boyle, Eamonn P
210. O'Brien, Margaret
211. O'Connell, Margaret V.
212. O'Connell, Martina
213. O'Crowley, Carmel & John Paul
214. O'Gara, W
215. O'Kane, Joanna
216. O'Laoghaire, Anne
217. O'Neill, E
218. O'Neill, Elaine
219. O'Neill, Maria
220. O'Regan, Miriam
221. O'Regan, Therese
222. O'Reilly, Owen & Andrea
223. O'Rourke, Una

224. O'Sullivan, Ellen
225. O'Sullivan, Patrick
226. O'Toole, Claire
227. Owens, Mary & Richard
228. Pender, Louzia
229. Perry, Agnes
230. Perry, Bridgie
231. Pettipiece, A
232. Phillis, Catherine
233. Phylan, Michael
234. Preisler, John
235. Price, Anne
236. Price, Bernie
237. Purdy, Kieran & Janet
238. Quigley, Mary
239. Quinn, Cathy
240. Reddin, Jane
241. Robinson, Anne & Denis
242. Roche, Mairéad
243. Rodgers, Mary
244. Rowan, Edel
245. Rutledge, Marian
246. Ryan, Donal E
247. Ryan, Elizabeth
248. Salm/Lynch, Andy & Lucy
249. Sexton, Geraldine
250. Skehill, Dolores
251. Slack, Katriona
252. Slattery, Patricia
253. Stone, Maria
254. Sullivan, Dr. Aine
255. Surlis, Ethna
256. Sulton, Stan
257. Tansey, Miriam,
258. Timmins, Billy, T.D.
259. Tobin ,Ed.,
260. Tobin, Patrick & Mary-Ruth
261. Tonra, Helen & John
262. Treacy Family,
263. Uí Dhuibhir, Pauline
264. Usher, Beny & Marion
265. Wall, Martina
266. Walsh, Mrs. Gail
267. Waterton, Eileen
268. Webster, Noreen
269. Whelan, Brenda

- 270. White, Joan
- 271. White, Patrick
- 272. White, Una
- 273. Whyte, Maura
- 274. Wood, Tom

**G.2 Submissions by Teachers, Schools/Colleges and Education Centres**

- 1. Abbey Community College, Wicklow
- 2. Allen Parish Schools, Allen, Robertstown, Milltown, Allenwood Boys, Allenwood Girls, Co. Kildare (per Musgrave, Maurice)
- 3. An tIonad Oideachais Trá Lí, Kileen Road, Oakpark, Trá Lí, Co. Chiarraí
- 4. Ashbourne Community School, Ashbourne, Co. Meath (per Miriam Meade)
- 5. Bheint, Lila, 'Bartra', Echo Gate, Trim, Co. Meath
- 6. Breen, Margaret,
- 7. Breen, Noreen, City of Dublin VEC Psychological Service
- 8. Butler, Stephanie, St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney, Co. Laois
- 9. Casey, Margaret, Queen of the Angels Primary School, Wedgewood, Sandyford Rd. Dublin 16
- 10. Church of Ireland College of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Rd. Dublin, 6.
- 11. Colaiste Mhuire, Marino, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9.
- 12. Coláiste Phobal Ros Cré, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary
- 13. Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge, 7 Cearnóg Muirfean, Baile Átha Cliath 2
- 14. Community College, Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick
- 15. Connor, Ruth, Monasteraden N.S., Co. Sligo
- 16. Corbett Dawn, Drumacrutin N.S., Dunraymond, Co. Monaghan
- 17. Culfadda N.S., Ballymote, Co. Sligo
- 18. Darcy, Kathleen, Parents' Association, Gaelscoil Iniscórthaidh, Co. Loch Garman
- 19. Deeney, Dolores, St. Mary's National School, St. Mary's Hill, Monaghan
- 20. Doherty, Carmel, Pobalscoil Charn Domhnach, Co. Dhún na nGall
- 21. Donlon, Kathleen RSM, Convent of Mercy, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
- 22. Doyle, Erika, Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Trinity College, Dublin, 2.
- 23. Doyle, Terence, City of Dublin VEC
- 24. Fee, Nuala, Sutton Park School, Sutton, Co. Dublin
- 25. Feeley, Una, Cornamaddy N.S., Athlone.
- 26. Franks, Lyn, Darley N.S., Monaghan Rd., Cootehill, Co. Cavan
- 27. Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
- 28. Fuller, Ray. Department of Psychology, Trinity College, Dublin 2.
- 29. Guardian Angels N.S., Páirc an Nuabhaile, Carraig Dhubh, Co. Átha Cliath
- 30. Hession, Eleanor M., Youthreach, The Glen, Cork
- 31. Honan, Ita, Literary Tutor, Ógra Dun Dealgan, Chapel St., Dundalk, Co. Louth

32. Inservice Education Department, Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick
33. Inver College, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan (per P.B. Drury, Principal)
34. Johnston, Jean, Rockwood House, Ballydehob, Co. Cork
35. Jones, Jacinta, St. David's Holy Faith Secondary School, Greystones, Co. Wicklow
36. Killinarden Community School, Tallaght, Dublin 24
37. King, Pádraig, Scoil Mhuire gan Smál, Ballymote, Co. Sligo
38. Laois Education Centre, Block Rd., Portlaoise, Co. Laois
39. Lydon, Sr. Regina, Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál, Ballymote, Co. Sligo
40. Maguire, Áine, Sacred Heart Primary School, Sruleen, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
41. Maher Pascal, Family Therapist,
42. Mary Immaculate College of Education, South Circular Road, Limerick.
43. Mc Auley, Philomena, Burtonwood, Balcath, Navan, Co. Meath
44. Merwick, John, St. Patrick's Boys' N.S., Gardiners Hill, Cork
45. Mhic Aodha Bhuí, Áine, Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, Plás an Bhainc, Sráid an Iarnróid, Portlaoise
46. Moriarity, Anne, St. Aidan's N.S. Monasteraden, Co. Sligo
47. Mulligan, Martin, High Park N.S., Skreen, Co. Sligo.
48. Mulligan, Paula, 32 Elisdale Pk., Cherry Orchard, Dublin 10
49. National University of Ireland, Galway
50. Ní Dhomhnaill, Gráinne, Education Department, University College, Dublin
51. Ní Fhatharta Connie, Stiúrthóir, Ionad Oideachais, Clonamore agus Árann
52. Ní Mhuimhneacháin, Síle, 3 Crestfield Green, Hazewood, Glanmire, Co. Cork
53. O'Boyle, Eamonn P., 193 Ard Easmuinn, Dundalk, Co. Louth
54. O'Brien, Claire, Dominican College, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
55. O'Brien, Marie, St. Peter Apostle Junior School, Neilstown, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
56. O'Gara, Una, 66 Cornmow Drive, London
57. O'Leary, Michael, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin
58. O'Brien, Marie, St. Peter Apostle Junior School, Neilstown, Clondalkin, Dublin 22
59. O'Neill, Seamus, Queen of Angels N.S., Wedgewood, Sandyford Rd., Dublin 16
60. O'Reilly, Antoinette, 50 South Main St., Naas, Co. Kildare
61. Penninsula Reading Group, Rush N.S., Co. Dublin
62. Phelan, Angela, Scoil Bhríde, Ballyroan, Portlaoise, Co. Laois
63. Phelan, Anne, National Co-Ordinator – Special Needs National Centre for Technology in Education, Dublin City University, Dublin 9
64. ,Quigley, Siobhan, St. David's Secondary School, Greystones, Co. Wicklow
65. Quinn, John, Scoil Mhuire na nGael, Dundalk, Co. Louth
66. Rossiter, Margaret, Learning Support Teacher
67. Ryan, Cathy

68. School of Clinical Speech/Language, Trinity College, Dublin
69. Scoil Aireagail, Ballyhale, Co. Kilkenny
70. Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe
71. Senior College of Further Education, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
72. St. Angela's College of Education, Lough Gill, Sligo
73. St. Killian's Specialist School, Cork
74. St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
75. St. Rose's N.S., Balrothery, Tallaght, Dublin 24
76. The Staff, St. Colman's N.S., Cloyne, Middleton, Co. Cork
77. The Staff, St. Patrick's N.S., Gowna, Co. Cavan
78. Tullow Community School, The Mullaun, Tullow, Co. Carlow
79. Tuohy, John, St. Paul's Primary School, Dooradoyle, Limerick
80. University College, Cork

### **G.3 Submissions by Organisations, Associations etc**

1. AHEAD (Association for Higher Access & Disability), Newman House, 86 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2
2. Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI), ASTI House, Winetavern Street, Dublin 8
3. Carroll, Philomena, Mullingar Branch of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Tyrellspass, Co. Westmeath
4. City of Dublin Psychological Service, Winstead, 25 Temple Rd., Dartry, Dublin 6
5. Coffey, Alan, Psychiatric Clinic, Health Centre, North Strand, Dublin 1
6. Comhdháil Naisiúnta na Gaeilge, Baile Átha Cliath 2
7. Community Services, Unit 6A, Celbridge Hill, Celbridge, Co. Kildare
8. Drogheda Partnership Company, 12 North Quay, Drogheda, Co. Louth
9. Dwyer, Catherine, Laois Branch, Dyslexia Association of Ireland
10. Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 1 Suffolk St., Dublin 2
11. Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Drogheda Branch, Co. Louth
12. Dyslexia Association of Ireland, North West Region, Ardara, Co. Donegal
13. Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Tullow Branch, Co. Carlow
14. Finglas/Cabra Partnership, Rosehill House, Finglas Rd., Finglas, Dublin 11
15. Franklin, Liz, Institute of Neuro-Development Therapy, Greenlea Clinic, 118 Greenlea Rd., Terenure, Dublin 6
16. Goddard Blyth, Sally, Warwick House, 4 Stanley Place, Chester
17. Harland, Rita, Primary Movement, P.O. Box 49, Belfast BT6 0AZ
18. Inishowen Partnership Company, St. Mary's Rd., Buncrana, Co. Donegal
19. Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE), Department of Special Education, St. Patrick's College, Dublin 9
20. Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) c/o Education Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
21. Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 35 Parnell Sq., Dublin 1

22. Kellner, Elisabeth, Deutsche Gesellschaft, Limerick
23. Kilkenny Employment for Youth, Garden Row, High St., Kilkenny
24. Mc Hugh, Mgt., Dyslexia Association, Glenties Branch, Co. Donegal
25. Monaghan Dyslexia Association, Rooskey Building, Monaghan
26. Muintearas Tír an Fhia, Tír an Fhia, Leitir Móir, Co. na Gaillimhe
27. Mullaney Máire, The Mill House, Whitechurch Rd., Dublin 14
28. Mulligan, Valerie, 8 Ayner Crescent, Courtown Park, Kilcock, Co. Kildare
29. National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), 76 Lower Gardiner St., Dublin 1
30. National Parents' Council, Postprimary, Parents' Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools (per Annette O'Connor)
31. Navan Travellers Training Centre
32. O'Brien, Brigid, West Cork Community Care, St. Anne's Hospital, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.
33. O'Donnell, Michael, Cork Individual Tuition, 19 Patrick's Hill, Cork
34. OAK Partnership, Edenderry Business Park, Edenderry, Co. Offaly
35. Páirtíocht Ghaeltacht Thír Chonail, An tEastát Tionsclaíoch, Na Doirí Beaga, Co. Dhún na nGall
36. Senior Traveller Training Centres, Quay House, Woodquay, Parnell St., Ennis,
37. South Kerry Development Partnership, Valentia Rd., Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry
38. South Wicklow Branch ACLD, c/o Community College, Arklow
39. Southside Partnership, 24 Adelaide St., Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
40. Stubbings Marie, Dyslexic Support Centre, Value Centre Building, Carey's Road,
41. Teachers' Union of Ireland, 73 Orwell Rd., Rathgar, Dublin 6
42. Tullamore Community Training Workshop, Kilcruttin Business Park, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
43. West Cork Community Care, St. Anne's Hospital, Skibbereen, Co. Cork
44. West Limerick Resources Ltd., Weigh House, The Market Yard, Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick
45. Youthreach, Dermot Stokes, National Co-ordinator.

## APPENDIX H

### THREE CASE HISTORIES

In this appendix, three case histories provided by students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are presented. The case studies, which are based on submissions made to the Task Force, reflect some of the challenges faced by students with such difficulties.

#### **Case History: Luke**

I went to school at the age of four. From as far back as I can remember, I didn't like school. I used to forget things a lot and the teacher was often cross with me. The other boys in the class would make fun of me and call me stupid. I tried everything to avoid school, and then my parents realised something was up. They went to the school and voiced their concerns to the teacher. I was now seven years old. She told them not to fuss and that I should concentrate more. My father had never liked school either and was a slow reader. School went from bad to worse, I couldn't understand what was going on and was bored in class. My classmates didn't like me. Because of my clumsiness, I was never picked for games. Two years later my parents again voiced concerns and this time the teacher listened and after a two- year wait I was assessed. The psychologist said I had Dyslexia and should get remedial teaching. I had to wait for six months before the remedial teaching started, which was half way through sixth class. I enjoyed this teaching because I could follow what was going on.

The next September I went to the local secondary school. It was a huge change. I used have to go to seven different classrooms every day and at different times. I could never remember and was always getting into trouble for being late. I felt lost again and couldn't do all the homework. There was no remedial teacher in this school and no one helped me understand what was going on. At the end of third year I failed the junior cert. My parents wanted me to repeat the year but I decided to leave school. I had enough of cross teachers, name calling, bullying, unhappiness.

Since I left school, I have been working on building sites. I still can't read very well and I find it embarrassing to have to ask my girlfriend to deal with forms for me. I am much happier that I will never have to go to school again. I hope my children won't have to suffer like me.

#### **Case History: Anne**

I went through primary school with a very helpful attitude. Learning was a bit of a mystery to me, so I soon realised by keeping quiet and smiling most of the time I

could wing it without being asked many questions. I used to have my hand up first when questions were asked and verbally I was fine but when we were asked to write our work down my problems began. I could not spell, so it was hard to write anything down. I had a younger sister in my class because I repeated a year, so a lot of the time I bribed her to help me. This is where the helpful attitude took over. I used to volunteer for little jobs around the school, which got me out of writing. I had to memorise my reading because I did not know the words. This worked up until third class, then it became a strain waiting for the teacher to notice. Work was harder and I found it very stressful. I was so tired when I came home from school and nearly always had a headache.

My mother took me for an assessment and discovered I was Dyslexic. She had an idea that may be my problem because my older brother is Dyslexic. I was told that I was a bright girl but had specific learning difficulties. This meant nothing to me because I felt stupid and could see my friends worked only when it suited them and could still write. My mother paid for private classes once a week but nobody helped me at school.

I started second level and first year was hard but a lot of days I was reduced to tears. When second year approached it was worse. Nobody understood my problem and the teachers had a course to cover and did not have time to give me but some of them were very nice to me and did not go into a rage when I did not have my homework done. I did start third year but got frightened when everyone started talking about the Junior Certificate. I was lost for words by then and it must have been showing on my face because my mother said if school was so hard we would find another way to get an Education. Since I spent two years in Youthreach and am now doing a Cert. Course. The course is over two hours from where I live. I feel bitter at having to leave home at fifteen to try to get an Education. I have a supportive and caring family otherwise I would be an emotional wreck.

### **Case History: Philip**

Our son Philip went to school at four years of age. He seemed to cope well up to first class. At first class he seemed to suddenly disimprove. The teacher agreed and sent Philip to the remedial teacher. She in turn recommended psychological assessment. It would have taken two years through the public system, so we decided to pay privately. It was found that Philip was dyslexic. We felt great relief that we weren't cracking up and that there was some reason for Philip's difficulties. We decided to get a teacher to come to our home once a week to Philip. His hours with the remedial teacher had been reduced due to an increase in her student load.

Through hard work, sweat and many tears and not just from Philip, we have now reached sixth class. It has not been easy. One of us sits with Philip every night. The homework lasts two to two and a half hours. We have tried every method for learning spelling from feeling them out in sand to putting them on a dictaphone.

The effort of reading for History, Geography and Science is so great that we read it for him. Philip learns best by listening. We have had to job share so as to have the time to devote to Philip. We are fearful that our other children might become resentful of all the time we spend with Philip. We are fearful about secondary school. Philip was bullied in primary school and this could be a bigger problem next year.

## Glossary

***Designated special schools for students with specific learning difficulties*** – primary-level students who meet specified criteria in relation to ability and achievement may enrol in a special school for students with specific learning difficulties (including difficulties arising from dyslexia). As is the case for special classes for students with specific learning difficulties in mainstream schools, placement is for one or two years; the student-teacher ratio is 11:1.

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

***Individual learning programme*** – a programme designed to address the individual needs of a student who is in receipt of supplementary teaching from a learning support or resource /special education teacher. An individual learning programme should specify long-term and short-term learning targets and provide an indication of how those targets might be achieved.

***Learning support teaching*** – supplementary teaching, provided by a learning support teacher, to students with low achievement in the first language and/or mathematics. Such teaching is available to students at both primary and post-primary levels. It generally involves the provision of additional support to small groups of students in a resource room, although other models of delivery, including one-to-one instruction, may be available. Learning support teachers were formerly known as remedial teachers.

***Resource teaching support*** – resource teaching support – usually consisting of one-to-one teaching for 2.5 hours per week – is available to primary and post-primary students with special education needs arising from specific learning difficulties (including difficulties arising from dyslexia) who are fully integrated into mainstream schools.

***Special classes in mainstream schools for students with specific learning difficulties*** – primary-level students who meet specified criteria in relation to ability and achievement may enrol in special classes for students with specific learning difficulties (including learning difficulties arising from dyslexia) in ordinary schools. Placement is for a period of one or two years, after which the student is expected to return to his/her own school; the pupil-teacher ratio in special classes for students with specific learning difficulties is currently 11:1.

***Specific learning difficulties*** – A student's learning difficulties, such as those arising from dyslexia, are specific to a particular area (or areas) of the curriculum such as reading. Such difficulties are unexpected in relation to the student's other abilities.

***Supplementary teaching*** – supplementary teaching is teaching provided by a learning-support teacher to groups of students (or to an individual student) in a learning-support room or in the student's own classroom. Supplementary teaching is based on agreed learning targets and activities as set out in each student's Individual Learning Programme.