

Written evidence from the British Dyslexia Association (FJP0011)

Executive Summary:

- There are 6.2 million people with dyslexia or related specific learning difficulties within the unemployed or economically inactive, this is largely due to barriers to employment.
- It would be a relatively cheap option to implement more reasonable adjustments within JCP to ensure that these individuals are assisted to use the service and find long term employment.
- It is essential that UC does not go exclusively digital as it would exclude so many people with dyslexia/SpLD. We have had ministerial assurance that this will not happen with Access to Work (AtW)
- The culture and systems of JCP need to change to avoid being punitive to these individuals with hidden disabilities. The British Dyslexia Association has trained befrienders (volunteers) who could help support this process. JCP staff need regular training in dyslexia awareness.
- The long term unemployed could be supported by specialist coaches as happens in DSA and AtW. Apprentices need literacy and numeracy support to be successful in their key skills tests. This could be delivered via AtW and specialist coaches.
- Co locating services is good but not in schools as so many dyslexic people regard these as a place where they were harmed.

1. **The British Dyslexia Association (BDA)** is one of the two major charities supporting individuals with dyslexia and related Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). We run the National Helpline, large projects with DfE and other funders, hosted the Dyslexia/SpLD Trust for 7 years, disseminate the most recent academic research in this arena, set standards for dyslexia friendly organisations, specialist teacher training courses and teachers, and run conferences and training courses. We have 50 affiliated local dyslexia associations in England and Wales.

10% of the UK population are dyslexic and another 5% have genetically related SpLD (dyspraxia/DCD, dyscalculia, ADHD, etc). The number of people of working age is 41.52 million, so, 6.2 million of these are affected by dyslexia/SpLD (source: Office for Nat. Stats 2014). Therefore, we seek to support their needs. We receive 16,000 enquiries to our Helpline each year, and many more also contact our local association helplines; half of our enquiries are from adults. From these cases, we know their needs are not currently being met (many have faced sanctioning of benefits as they cannot manage the number of job applications required; JCP staff have not

universally known about or responded to reasonable adjustments on these targets; attending JCP interviews is stressful and, under stress, these individuals lose their coping strategies; some have been in the Universal Credit (UC) pilot and cannot operate the system leading to severe financial hardship; job seekers with dyslexia/SpLD are routinely “parked”). Those with dyslexia/SpLD are disproportionately represented in the long term unemployed. This is a tremendous waste of talent for the UK and for individuals as many, with simple adjustments, could become loyal and effective employees.

This consultation offers a real opportunity to make a seed change for dyslexic people, helping them into work and switching from benefits to being contributors to our economy.

2. Digital applications

Undiagnosed and inappropriate teaching methods leave most dyslexic individuals with weaker literacy skills. They usually have working memory problems. Those with severe problems tend to be functionally illiterate and long term unemployed. They will be **digitally excluded**. We have had assurances from the Minister that the Access to Work service will not go exclusively digital so that our interest group is not locked out. We expect the same offer to be extended to universal credit applications.

3. More Frequent JCP interviews.

The interview process is one of the most stressful events for dyslexic/SpLD people. Under stress, they lose their normal coping strategies. Reasonable adjustments (such as those accepted within our legal system) need to be implemented for interviews. These are not expensive but require specific knowledge and a willingness to introduce them. We recommend that JCP staff are trained in awareness and the use of reasonable adjustments in interviews. We provided very well received training to staff at the Basildon Access to Work office last year (under the Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN) umbrella of which we were founder members), and before that trained staff in Cardiff, London and Scotland.

Another way forward would be to permit the person to have a “befriender” with them. BDA has an existing training programme for befrienders, some of which can be delivered by our elearning offering. This would provide very inexpensive but immediate support.

4. JCP to support the long term unemployed.

Individuals with dyslexia/SpLD are over represented in the long term unemployed. The job application process plays upon their weaknesses, yet they have many strengths that employers need (from grit and determination to creativity, atypical problem solving, empathy to data/pattern analysis skills.) We need to ensure this large proportion of our working population get jobs and retains them. This requires specialist knowledge of coping strategies Specialist coaches already exist and are used very effectively within the DSA system to support students and in the Access to Work (AtW) scheme. We recommend that the AtW scheme be extended to include the long term unemployed, disabled individuals (which would include those with dyslexia/SpLD).

Literacy issues continue to be a problem for many and currently there is no support for these adults. We recommend that they are provided with specialist dyslexia help with literacy acquisition, under the AtW scheme. BDA has extensive experience in this area both directly and leading multi charity teams for this.

5. Development of Support Offer for low income individuals.

We welcome this but would also encourage this to be linked to (4) above. Our aim would be to develop these individuals' skills to keep their jobs and for higher income jobs where they could contribute to tax. Many dyslexic adults either do not know they are dyslexic or do not count their difficulties as constituting a disability (yet a large number would meet the legal criteria of a long lasting condition which impacts on daily living.) We deal with calls and emails every week from individuals who are having difficulty holding down their job, are under threat of dismissal or are so stressed that they are going off on long term sick leave. This situation only contributes eventually to the long term unemployed or economically inactive.

6. Co location of services.

We notice that there is a focus here on co location with health and mental health services. We applaud the desire to locate services where users naturally go. Civic centres which house CAB, CVC, housing offices etc are known to be effective for footfall and cross fertilisation. There is an overlap between dyslexia, underachievement, poverty, stress, anxiety and depression so co locating with health services makes sense.

Co locating with schools, however, would be generally detrimental for our users. Initial teacher training does not include dyslexia/SpLD awareness and

so most individuals go through years of lack of recognition of their problems. School is a place of pain and humiliation for most. It might be more acceptable to use FE colleges.

A possible opportunity exists for co locating services with the dyslexia charities such as ourselves. This is where this group of individuals go for help so it makes sense to use this footfall.

7. Advice for 12-18 year olds on traineeships and apprentices

This is valuable, it is also currently being funded by DfE, and BDA has worked on such projects previously. The need here is to join up the services to get the best from both. It would be good to include within the AtW support to apprentices, support on the academic topics required for their key skills. This was previously provided by the better apprenticeship providers and required considerable input but is generally not now available. Without this support, many apprentices with dyslexia will fail due to their inadequate literacy and/or numeracy abilities. This is particularly wasteful as these young people are often able to contribute exceptional practical skills and other abilities such as empathy with customers, a strong determination to succeed at a task and 3D thinking which is very useful for electricians and plumbers.

8. Devolution/QA/Capability issues.

Training needs to be implemented for all staff on awareness of dyslexia/SpLD and mental health issues. This needs to include signposting opportunities as JCP staff cannot become experts in all these areas. We have first hand experience of working with AtW where awareness training has made a difference (though it must be repeated as staff turnover). Quality assurance is essential in helping to identify areas that are problematic. This must include qualitative data from users about how the service has helped them into work, not just performance criteria on turnaround times and reaction level satisfaction with staff interface.

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