



DYSLEXIA:

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Supporting trade union members with unseen disabilities and learning differences can be quite overwhelming. The STUC Disabled Workers' Committee offers this short briefing paper as an overview of things to consider when representing a member. Dyslexia has been described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of suitable learning opportunities. It is estimated that 10% of our population has dyslexia, and between four and five percent of those (or 2.5%) have severe dyslexic difficulties.

While those with dyslexia benefit from early identification, it is estimated that 75% of all dyslexic people are identified as being dyslexic after reaching the age of 21. Many adults with dyslexia did not fulfil their potential at school and some may have an inadequate level of literacy and numeracy skills. Dyslexia, however, is much wider than literacy and numeracy, and it is not only a learning-related issue. It can create barriers to recruitment and retention of jobs, and to the understanding of important health and safety information, as well as affecting home, family and community life. Trade unions should therefore have an understanding of dyslexia, and work with others to raise awareness of dyslexia-related issues. This briefing is not designed to make union reps experts on dyslexia, but to help them support members with dyslexia in the workplace.

Dyslexia Scotland is a national charity supporting children and adults with dyslexia in Scotland. It has a wide range of high-quality resources available from its website for people with dyslexia, and also information useful to parents, educators, employers and others who support dyslexic people. The STUC, through Scottish Union Learning, works in partnership with Dyslexia Scotland to promote awareness of dyslexia, assist with issues related to the workplace, and to facilitate support for union members who may have dyslexia.

In addressing issues related to dyslexia, the main advice for reps would be to:

- Ensure your member is aware of their rights under the Equality Act 2010, and aware of their responsibility for their own health and safety, and that of their co-workers.
- Encourage them to disclose their dyslexia to their employer, thus ensuring the employer is aware of their legal responsibilities
- Help them to be fully supported by their training and development, and human resources departments, if appropriate
- Find out if your national union has a policy on dyslexia
- Work with Scottish Union Learning and Dyslexia Scotland to source available dyslexia awareness and training opportunities for reps
- Facilitate dyslexia awareness sessions in your respective workplace, for both workers and management
- Encourage your trade union to become involved in national Dyslexia Awareness Week activities

There are some examples of good practice within trade unions; some have organised dyslexia awareness-raising training for staff and management; some have introduced dyslexia policies as part of the equalities agenda; some Union Learning Reps and union members have undertaken the SQA Professional Development Award 'Supporting Individuals with Dyslexia in Learning and Workplace Settings', which has enabled them to learn more about the issues involved, e.g. how to recognise indications of dyslexia, screening and assessments, and difficulties in the workplace. It helps them to provide support to fellow workers, and help their own respective workplaces become 'dyslexia-friendly'.

Case Study – John

This case study demonstrated the valuable role of Union Learning Reps in supporting workers and negotiating with employers and learning providers to give appropriate assistance. John had worked in the Glasgow Royal Mail Centre for many years. He had disclosed his dyslexia to his employer when he was first recruited, but struggled in his job, particularly when sorting mail, and also because the system was constantly changing to improve efficiency. These changes caused most staff to struggle until they got used to new system, but it was much more difficult for John.

When John enrolled on a language class in the on-site learning centre, his ULR noticed that he had difficulties with the registration process and discussed this with him. The ULR made arrangements with the course tutor and John was given some extra help. The ULR realised that John must have some difficulty at work, and this was taken up with management. Subsequently, John was moved into a different role that was a bit easier for him, and he became much more confident in his abilities.

John is now much happier at work. He is a very talented person and has some interesting hobbies. He now reads books and writes short stories, although he claims that spelling is his biggest problem. He is also in a band and can play both guitar and drums; he even writes songs. John does not let his dyslexia hold him back in any way!

Resources for Representatives

Scottish Union Learning Dyslexia Guide

<http://www.scottishunionlearning.com/support/everyday-skills/dyslexia-guide>

Dyslexia Scotland

<http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/>

What is dyslexia?

http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/page_content/WhatIsDyslexia.pdf

Information for Adults

http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/page_content/downloads/guide_adults_employers.pdf

Dyslexia: A Guide for Adults and Employers

<http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/links-and-resources>

(scroll down to see the relevant leaflets under 'Adults' 'Further Education' and 'Workplace')