

# University of Oxford

## Assessment of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

The following guidance for diagnostic assessments is based on recommendations from a Working Group on Specific Learning Difficulties commissioned jointly by the Education Committee and the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee of the University of Oxford, which reported in Trinity Term 2011.

The working group's recommendations aim to enable the collegiate University to provide a better coordinated framework of support for students with specific learning difficulties. The recommendations are rooted in the extensive data collection, interviews, research and analysis undertaken by the group whose membership included internal and external experts.

The working group was of the view that students should always be strongly encouraged to access all sources of support available to them and in particular the Disabled Students' Allowance. It is important therefore that a diagnostic assessment is not viewed simply as a route to obtaining extra time in examinations. A diagnostic assessment should provide a student with a greater understanding of his / her profile of strengths and weaknesses and consider how this profile pattern might impact upon academic study. The assessment report may also be used to develop greater self-awareness and inform strategy development in managing key academic tasks whilst studying in a demanding, challenging and intensive academic environment.

In order to grant examination adjustments, the University Proctors require that a full diagnostic assessment has been carried out by an educational psychologist or specialist teacher with a qualification recognised under the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines and holding a valid current [PATOSS] practising certificate. Diagnostic assessments should have been conducted when the student was aged 16 years or over, using adult tests, and on an individual rather than a group basis.

Undergraduate students' reports should normally be no more than 3 years old and postgraduate students' reports normally no more than 5 years old at the date of entry to the university. Students continuing directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study will not normally require a new diagnostic assessment but should contact the Disability Advisory Service for guidance on how to proceed.

The University Proctors require reports to follow the report format and tests recommended in the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines and support the working group's recommendation that the following assessments in particular provide the University with significant information in understanding and supporting students.

Continued overleaf

In order to support requests for exam adjustments such as extra time, permission to use a word processor and the use of relevant assistive software<sup>1</sup>, the University asks that you administer the following assessments, or equivalents in line with the DfES Guidelines 2005:

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, 4th Edition UK version (WAIS–IVUK)

**OR**

- Wechsler Memory Scale, 4th Edition UK version (WMS–IV)
- Plus - Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI)

**and**

- Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP)
- Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)
- The Adult Reading Test (ART)
- Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT4)

**Plus**

- An assessment of writing speed, preferably from a piece of free writing over a time frame of at least 15 minutes
- Discussion of strategies used for handling academic texts. It may be helpful to review samples of work produced for A Levels, or equivalent, including exploring strategies employed and time taken to complete component tasks, such as reading, note taking, planning, writing, proofreading and editing etc.
- Where the assessor is inclined to recommend word processing in examinations as a reasonable adjustment, an assessment of typing speed. The typing test should constitute a sufficient test of students' ability to plan, compose and type in order adequately to inform decisions on special examination arrangements.

Recommendations for examination arrangements should be clearly and explicitly stated, e.g. 25% extra time, use of word processor, rest breaks. The standard extra time allowance for students with SpLDs is now **25%** (15 minutes per hour) both for hand written and word processed exams. Any recommendation for additional extra time over the standard 25% would need to be fully justified.

Please note that the University of Oxford has intensive 8-week terms, that written examinations usually last for 3 hours and that undergraduate and graduate students will **NOT** normally be allowed extra time for coursework (including theses and dissertations) on the grounds of a specific learning difficulty unless additional extenuating circumstances apply.

Thank you for following our guidelines and thereby enabling the Disability Advisory Service and University academic and non-academic staff to provide the most appropriate support, advice and guidance to students with specific learning difficulties at the University of Oxford.

Last revised 9 January 2012

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<sup>1</sup> JAWS, Texthelp and Dragon Naturally Speaking are currently available in the word processing facility for student examinations