
■ Identification, Assessment and Intervention—Implications of an Audit on Dyslexia Policy and Practice in Scotland

Gavin Reid*, Pamela Deponio and Louise Davidson Petch

Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

This article reports on research commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). It aimed to establish the range and extent of policy and provision in the area of specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and dyslexia throughout Scotland. The research was conducted between January and June 2004 by a team from the University of Edinburgh. The information was gathered from a questionnaire sent to all education authorities (100% response rate was achieved). Additional information was also obtained from supplementary interviews and additional materials provided by education authorities.

The results indicated that nine education authorities in Scotland (out of 32) have explicit policies on dyslexia and eight authorities have policies on SpLD. It was noted however that most authorities catered for dyslexia and SpLD within a more generic policy framework covering aspects of Special Educational Needs or within documentation on 'effective learning'.

In relation to identification thirty-six specific tests, or procedures, were mentioned. Classroom observation, as a procedure was rated high by most authorities. Eleven authorities operated a formal staged process combining identification and intervention. Generally, authorities supported a broader understanding of the role of identification and assessment and the use of standardized tests was only part of a wider assessment process.

It was however noted that good practice in identification and intervention was not necessarily dependent on the existence of a dedicated policy on SpLD/dyslexia.

*Correspondence to: Gavin Reid, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, Scotland EH48 8AQ, UK. E-mail: gavin.reid@ed.ac.uk

Over fifty different intervention strategies/programmes were noted in the responses. Twenty-four authorities indicated that they had developed examples of good practice.

The results have implications for teachers and parents as well as those involved in staff development. Pointers are provided for effective practice and the results reflect some of the issues on the current debate on dyslexia particularly relating to early identification. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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BACKGROUND

In relation to the development of policy and practice in dyslexia, education authorities can be influenced by four major factors:

- current debates in the research field over terminology, causes and assessment of dyslexia;
- the current move towards developing dyslexia-friendly procedures within the context of inclusion;
- accountability, particularly the voice of parents, parents groups and representatives from the voluntary associations; and
- commissioned reports and legislative developments in SEN and dyslexia.

Although this research was set within the Scottish context many of the issues and the implications from the findings, will have relevance and potential impact throughout the UK and internationally. The first two, in particular, the current debate over the use of terminology, assessment criteria and the developing of dyslexia-friendly procedures within the context of inclusion featured significantly in this research and will be the principal focus for this article.

METHOD

The data was collected in three main ways. These were:

Questionnaire: A detailed and comprehensive questionnaire was developed by the research team, piloted with one Education Authority and approved by the Scottish Executive before it was submitted to all Education Authorities.

All questionnaires were sent to the same level of management within the authority—Head of Services. The questionnaire was however completed by representatives from different professional groups. For example, in some authorities the questionnaire was completed by Principal Educational Psychologists and in others by Support for Learning Managers. A 100% return rate was achieved.

Face-to-face interviews/telephone follow-up/analysis of supplementary information: Additional information was obtained from fourteen authorities—the sample was selected after considering a number of factors. These included the presence of an innovation, or good practice; the authority's satisfaction with current practice, or the lack of a policy on specific learning difficulty (SpLD)/dyslexia.

RESULTS

Current Debates on Terminology, Causes and Identification and Assessment of Dyslexia

It is now widely accepted that the term dyslexia and SpLD have different meanings and can relate to different populations (Reid, 2003; McIntyre & Deponio, 2003). The national dyslexia friendly campaign which witnessed collaboration between the British Dyslexia Association and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (Peer, 2004; MacKay, 2004) appeared to have effectively promoted the discrete concept of dyslexia. Dyslexia however can still be seen as a sub-set of specific learning difficulties and in the study carried out by the authors it was noted that at least eight authorities in Scotland continue to prefer to use the term specific learning difficulties that includes dyslexia. It was not too surprising therefore that twenty-three authorities covered dyslexia and specific learning difficulty in the same more general policy document. This may therefore indicate that some educational authorities have assumed dyslexia and SpLD to be describing the same population of children. This might be seen as being more in line with current thinking on inclusion and the need to mainstream the identification and intervention context for dyslexia.

Examples of the titles of such documents are shown below:

- Support for Learning Policy
- Additional Support Needs Policy
- Inclusive Education Policy
- Support for Learning File
- A Manual for Support for Learning
- Support for Learning Framework for Learning Difficulties (not for SpLD)
- Pupil Support Guidelines
- Support for Children and Young People
- Access to Learning for All
- SEN—Meeting the Challenge; Making Changes

This practice of including dyslexia within a generic policy can be appropriate. It can also however be deceptive and provide an impression that dyslexia/SpLD is not being given a high enough priority because the policy does not explicitly mention dyslexia/SpLD in the title. This, of course, may not be the case. In fact during the follow-up interviews it was noted that dyslexia was still catered for within its identification and intervention procedures.

Barriers to Implementing Policy

More than half the authorities indicated that they had not encountered any significant barriers that could prevent the implementation of the policy. The barriers that were identified by the other authorities included:

- concern over numbers of children requiring support,
- requests for additional training,
- reluctance to label too early,
- lack of staff awareness that resulted in late identification,
- dyslexia being only one of a range of 'inclusion issues,'

- lack of clarity of views on dyslexia,
- primary 1 teachers not fully valuing the nursery IEP,
- 'the "waiting for an assessment" mentality among some teachers not being helpful—indicating they should be able to use their skills and experiences to intervene appropriately even if an assessment has not been conducted'.

This latter point is extremely important and one that underlines a number of current issues on identification and intervention in relation to SpLD/dyslexia. It has been suggested that effective means of intervention with children with dyslexia might involve interactive teaching and developing thinking and metacognitive skills, ensuring overlearning and planning and presentation of materials, tasks and identifying the barriers to learning (Reid, 2003). This supports the view of the response above that a 'wait for an assessment' should not preclude the development of appropriate teaching approaches. A formal assessment may detect additional information about the child, but the intervention should not be put 'on hold' until that time. It can be suggested that such formal assessment may not always be necessary if the 'within school' barriers to learning—that includes examining how tasks are planned, developed and presented to ease of curriculum access is the principal focus.

The types of responses from authorities in relation to overcoming the barriers to implementation of the authorities policy include:

- implementing 'catch-up' programmes,
- extensive and comprehensive training including early identification, special assessment arrangements, ICT, study and learning skills, compulsory input in probationer training,
- issuing updated guidelines and
- a centralized on-line version of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses on dyslexia that can be accessed by all schools.

The Current Trend of Developing Dyslexia-friendly Identification, Assessment and Intervention Procedures

The responses indicated that authorities are of the view that identification requires more than reference to a particular test(s). This is particularly the view with reference to the early years. Eleven authorities noted this. These authorities indicated that they used a staged intervention process that involved more than reference to tests alone. This included: liaison with support for learning staff, Primary 1 teacher observation, Primary 2/3 interim screening, home visiting service and parental discussion. Some authorities also referred to checklists as a starting point.

The most popular method mentioned in the responses was a stage-process of identification involving input from a range of individuals within the authority. This process also included input from parents. Some of the customized screening and checklists developed and used by authorities were quite sophisticated and often tied in with the more generic early years screening.

Although a great number of individual tests were mentioned in the responses, these represented only part of the authorities battery of tests that could be accessed as, and when, necessary. The key identification processes seemed to focus on early screening, observation and multidisciplinary discussion involving the class teacher and/or specialist teacher.

Intervention Strategies/Resources

It is widely accepted that there are considerable resources and strategies that can be used to address dyslexia in the classroom. The responses from the Local Authorities provided in total a list of over fifty different resources and strategies. Why these particular resources were selected by authorities is of particular interest, as is the extent to which the authority has evaluated the use of these resources.

Table 1 below illustrates the range of strategies/resources identified by the authorities. The research team have divided these into the following three categories;

- Individualized/small group approaches.
- Curriculum focussed approaches.
- Whole class activities.

The study did not reveal whether individualized/small group approaches were managed within the class or in a support base. The numbers of children requiring support might suggest however that some groups were supported in a base.

INNOVATORY PRACTICES

One of the purposes of this audit was to identify the existence of good/innovatory practice. Information on this was therefore requested in the audit questionnaire and followed up with individual interviews with a sample of the local authorities.

Twenty-four authorities responded positively to this question indicating they had in place a procedure/resource that they considered to be good practice. A selection of the responses are shown below:

- A framework for intervention package;
- Quality in-service and training;
- The production of a CD-ROM involving children with dyslexia and their parents;
- Intensive support for reading programme;
- Voice recognition software initiatives;
- Indirect learning computer programme (IDL) (only authority in UK to provide this system in all mainstream primary and secondary schools). It is specifically designed for pupils with dyslexic type difficulties. The system is now available in all primary schools and three secondary schools in the authority;
- 'Closing the Gap' project in conjunction with University of Glasgow and Early Intervention. Positively reported Times Educational Supplement (January 2004);
- Dyslexia advisors in all schools;
- Summer school;
- Educational Psychologist Network for SpLD/dyslexia;
- ICT assessment team with dyslexia focus;
- Development of outreach programmes and collaborative initiatives with cluster schools;

Table 1. The range of resources/strategies identified by authorities

Individualized/small group approaches	Curriculum focussed-approaches	Whole class/school activities
Units of sound	Differentiated curriculum	Multisensory methods
Onset and rime	Differentiated teaching	Movement programmes/ rocker and wobble boards
Specialized technology	Differentiated outcomes	Brain gym as a whole class activity
Toe by toe	Informed assessments/ evidence based	Access to bottled water on a daily basis
Word wasp	Target setting	Synthetic phonics
Phonological awareness training	IEP/IAP (as required)	Addressing learning styles
Paired reading		Thinking skills
		Dyslexia-friendly schools award (one authority)
Phonic codecracker		Launch into reading success
Ann Arbour tracking		Phonological approaches to teaching (PAT)
Write from the start		Jolly phonics
Beat dyslexia		Range of ICT
Alpha to omega		Mindmapping
Stile dyslexia		Study skills
Dyslexia games pack		Development of whole class multi-sensory approaches
Reading reflex		Development of meta-cognitive skills
Sound linkage		Derbyshire file for dyslexia-friendly schools
Support through literacy base		Alpha smart
Simultaneous oral spelling		Phonological awareness procedures
Indirect learning system for dyslexic pupils		Co-writer
Earobics		Pen friend
Alphabet arc		Wellington Square
Teaching reading and spelling to the dyslexic child		Oxford reading tree
Spellwell		Fuzzbuzz
		'Thinking about it' (authority scheme that uses metacognitive and phonological awareness approaches)
		Work on self-esteem

Note: Some of these can be placed into more than one of the categories but only one category has been selected for each resource.

- Pilot of nursery screening;
- Parent and professional support group partnership;
- Multi-agency training on language and literacy;
- Literacy support serviced;
- Clicker 4 training;
- Early Screening project (p2-3) in use in over 75% of schools;

- Authority-developed follow-up baseline assessment materials to evaluate Early Intervention Language Strategy also used in schools to screen and track entrants at P1–P3;
- Early Intervention Project;
- Assessment framework including P1 and P2 screening packs;
- Initiatives with PE staff;
- Systematic use of paired reading;
- Dyslexia support pack (staff development tool that can accommodate new good practice as it develops);
- Phonological awareness screening pilot;
- Dyslexia network of teachers/EPs that meet termly to exchange views with the aim of developing a curricular dyslexia resource to be accessed via the intranet;
- Pupil assessment profile—a holistic representation of the child/young person involving a wide variety of professionals and personnel. This is a dynamic model of assessment that is tabled through staged intervention meetings;
- Investigating fast forward phonics;
- ICT programmes;
- Dyslexia support packs;
- Training programmes on hard and software for pupils with SpLD;
- Courses run with speech and language therapists for class teachers and assistants.

This appears an impressive and quite a varied list. Some of these initiatives have been internally and externally evaluated and others are currently undergoing evaluation. These represent a useful focus for further investigation in future studies.

Within the scope of this research project it was decided to visit a sample of authorities to obtain more details on some of these initiatives. Two examples are displayed below. One is of a pupil assessment profile and the other an example of one of the policies on dyslexia.

PUPIL ASSESSMENT PROFILE

One authority had developed a procedure that gathered information for the development of a pupil assessment profile. This profile involved a four-staged process that has the potential to gather information from eighteen attainment/curriculum-related areas. The processes is co-ordinated by the Support for Learning Area Network Team all of whom are highly experienced and trained and have a responsibility for staff development within the authority. This process seemed to be highly effective and the senior representatives of the authority interviewed reported a very low level of parent dissatisfaction within the area of dyslexia/SpLD. Parents are involved at all four stages of the process. The process is seen as dynamic and flexible and the authority is confident that it is flexible enough to accommodate to the implications of changes that will result from the Additional Support Needs Bill (SEED, 2004). This legislation promotes the concept of Additional Support Needs rather than Special Educational Needs. It defines all learning support needs as additional support needs. The legislation

places a duty on education authorities to identify and take steps to address support needs for learning for all children.

What is particularly interesting about the use of this is that the authority in question did not have a discrete policy for dyslexia. Dyslexia and SpLD are subsumed within more generic policies such as:

- Access to Learning for All.
- Support for Children and Young People.
- Skills for Life.
- Every Parent, Every Child.

During the interview it was also revealed that the authority is investigating and piloting the concept of dyslexia-friendly schools. It is likely this approach will be adopted in at least one primary school.

EXAMPLE OF AN AUTHORITY'S POLICY

A summary of one of the authorities that had a policy on dyslexia is shown below. The policy outlined details on the following:

- terminology,
- incidence,
- identification and assessment,
- range of support,
- early intervention,
- dealing with dyslexia,
- primary/secondary transfer,
- supporting pupils across the curriculum,
- technology,
- staff development,
- psychological services,
- parents.

The policy also contains a number of appendices on approaches to meeting the needs of children who may be dyslexic, strategies to help children at the early stages and in school, a checklist of early observation, checklist of early indicators of dyslexia in the early years and guidance for identification in the later stages of primary school.

This authority has also produced the following:

- A 'brief guide for parents' on dyslexia. This leaflet outlines the indicators of dyslexia, the action parents may take if they think their son/daughter may be dyslexic, what might happen then in relation to the action the authority will take and how parents can help.
- An innovative Dyslexia Friendly Schools Award—Criteria for Primary Schools. There are two sets of criteria—level A which represents compulsory criteria and level B which indicates that 90% of that criteria needs to be met as well as all of criteria A. Criteria A consists of criteria relating to identification of difficulties such as 'parents with ongoing concerns about their child would be offered an assessment. This is part of the staged process.' 'A log should be kept in each school of dates and details of concerns raised by parents.' 'If the

assessment is not to be a full psychological assessment this should be clearly stated to the parent and confirmed in writing’.

- An early screening process for all pupils with any difficulties in P1. ‘A “fast track” procedure through the steps of assessment has been established for pupils whose difficulties are identified at a later stage in their school career’.
- In relation to training this authority criteria state that ‘there should be a teacher trained in dyslexia to certificate level within the school’ and that all other school staff—office staff, classroom assistants, janitorial staff and catering staff—should be given a basic awareness presentation on dyslexia. The criteria also state that ‘all staff who wish to extend expertise in the dyslexia field should be encouraged through review and development backed with the appropriate financial support to do so’.
- This authority has produced Guidelines for Parents and Carers and Guidelines for Class Teachers. The guidelines for class teachers included information and guidance on differentiation of the curriculum, teaching materials and on teaching organizational skills as well as sections on reading, spelling, writing, homework, study skills and the use of ICT.
- This authority also stressed the following: *‘there is a clear commitment to identifying children with specific learning difficulties as early as possible. The Pre-School Home Visiting Service is a valued resource that can be available to families from the start of child’s life. Pre-school placements of children with known specific learning difficulties are then carefully planned to ensure effective support and intervention. We now have in addition to a specialist pre-school provision for children with additional support needs, three pre-school early intervention services which provide a range of supports to children. A key aspect of these services is to promote children’s language and communication development and to identify emerging factors that may cause ongoing concern’.*

TRAINING

It can be suggested that the key to successful implementation of both identification and intervention procedures for dyslexia/SpLD is training. In Scotland there has been a major focus on training courses on dyslexia for at least ten years (Reid, 2001). This was in fact reflected in many of the responses collected in this research and a number of authorities indicated that training in dyslexia, at least, had been well established.

All authorities offered some form of training in this area.

Some of the responses included the following:

- All teaching staff is offered accredited training in SpLD/dyslexia through the modular programme in Support for Learning and SEN. A non-accredited training course is offered in the authority course calendar.
- Courses offered in a rolling programme of SEN and Inclusion.
- Programme developed by EP service in Partnership with the Pre-School Home Visiting Service.
- Additional Support Needs Training.
- In house five week twilight course.
- Training by Support for Learning Team.

- External university validated training for all Support for Learning Assistants.
- Year long training programme for staff to deliver intensive support for early Literacy.

The above can be summarized by reference to three main avenues of training:

1. External accredited and presented courses (usually part of a university modular scheme).
2. In-house courses on specific areas aimed at class teachers/probationer teachers and often run by Support for Learning Teachers.
3. Top-up events involving nationally recognized speakers.

Further research could investigate the quality and the extent of uptake and the feedback from participants on these courses.

DISCUSSION

The striking aspect in relation to the responses from authorities is the variation on how each meets the needs of children with dyslexia. It is also interesting to note how each authority seemed to have some form of commitment to dyslexia, though the extent and the nature of that varied considerably.

There did seem to be a trend towards dealing with dyslexia within a more generic framework and even those policies that were solely on dyslexia referred to more generally applicable educational documents on meeting the needs of all.

Many of the additional comments received from authorities commented on ongoing changes in relation to legislation and many authorities were currently reviewing policy to take account of the need to 'develop inclusive practices in schools'.

One of the interesting aspects of the research related to the developments in identification and assessment. There was a strong view expressed in most authorities for the need for a 'contextual assessment approach where children's development across skill areas is monitored, recorded and planned for through shared observations between home and schools'.

Training courses in dyslexia have been well established now in Scotland for a number of years. The impetus provided by the Scottish Dyslexia Trust (SDT) and later the joint funding partnership between the SDT and the Scottish Executive, has ensured that quality courses have been available for educational authorities throughout Scotland. Many authorities commented that they had taken up these courses. The uptake was also geographically wide from Shetland to the Scottish Borders.

It seems however that the group of teachers engaged in the nationally produced modular courses were specialist learning support teachers.

Considerably fewer class teachers had been involved in these initiatives. There now appears to be a trend, and certainly a desire, as indicated in the responses from authorities to develop in-house courses designed specifically for classroom teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the responses from this research indicated that all authorities in Scotland seemed to be engaged in some way in the area of dyslexia/SpLD. This can be through more generic projects on aspects of teaching and learning and

meeting the wide ranging needs of children, identification procedures, a range of intervention strategies, various forms of monitoring and recording of pupils progress, and through a variety of training programmes.

Although not all authorities had a specific policy on dyslexia this did not seem to deter the authority from embarking on sensitive procedures to identify children who were at risk in relation to dyslexia/SpLD.

A wide variety of assessment strategies, including tests, were utilized.

One of the important factors relating to this was the contextual considerations within the identification procedures utilized in the various authorities. Those procedures emphasized multidisciplinary collaboration, parent participation, high levels of training, and ongoing monitoring and recording of pupil progress.

One of the striking features to emerge from the responses was the quantity and the diversity of projects authorities are engaged in—all with some relevance to the areas of dyslexia/SpLD. There were also some common elements of practice within the thirty-two education authorities. One in particular was the stage process of identification and assessment even though there were differences in policy and procedures within the different authorities.

Individual variation in terms of formulating policy, assessment, intervention and training seemed however to be more obvious than the similarities. This, in itself, is not necessarily a negative factor but it can be confusing for parents moving from one geographical area of Scotland to another (Davidson Petch, 2004; Reid, 2004).

Some other areas of concern to emerge from the responses related to:

- the 'piecemeal' developments in practice, particularly in identification and intervention. These practices could be co-ordinated and enhanced through collaboration between different authorities and
- the *ad hoc* process of developing innovation and 'good practices'. Much of this seems to be left to one individual/group who have a particular interest in a specific aspect of work.

This research, although focussed on the context in Scotland has relevance to screening and intervention policy and practice and to the evaluation, development and dissemination of existing good practices in all geographical areas.

APPENDIX

Scotland-wide Audit of Education Authority Early Years Policies and Provision regarding Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)/Dyslexia

Questionnaire to Education Authorities in Scotland

Name of Authority:

Name and position of person completing questionnaire:

A. Policy

Please interpret policy here in its widest sense, to mean any sort of established guidelines or procedures set by the education authority and put into practice in schools that cater for the early years, meaning the first three years of school education.

1. Does the authority have a policy for specific learning difficulties?
2. Does the authority have a policy for dyslexia?

3. Are dyslexia and specific learning difficulties covered by the same policy? If not, please specify why.
4. If the authority has a particular policy document on specific learning difficulties and/or dyslexia can you indicate below the title of the document and how it can be obtained? (If possible please enclose a copy).
5. How are the following made aware of the policy:
 - (i) School management?
 - (ii) Teaching staff?
6. Does the policy contain specific guidance for:
 - (i) Assessment?
 - (ii) Teaching?

Please give details indicating to whom the guidance is offered and in what way.

7. If the policy does not contain specific examples of guidance for assessment and teaching, can you indicate below how guidance is actually provided to staff within the authority, with some examples of this guidance?
8. Has the policy that is currently in place for early years in relation to specific learning difficulties and dyslexia been evaluated?
9. If so
 - (i) How was the policy evaluated, when and by whom?
 - (ii) Can you briefly indicate what the result of the evaluation was?
 - (iii) Has the evaluation been used by the authority to inform subsequent policy and practice in this area? Give details.
10. How does the policy that is currently in place fit into the authority's overall strategic plan for identifying and addressing children's learning needs in the early years?
11. Would you consider specific learning difficulties and dyslexia a priority area in the authority's strategic plan? Please provide reasons for your response.

B. Intervention strategies and teaching practice

1. Detail below the approaches taken by the authority to identify children with specific learning difficulties and dyslexia in the early years in the authority.
2. What factors—circumstances informed the decision to adopt this approach(es)?
3. Can you list below the specific tests, assessment strategies and resources that are used in the authority *to identify* specific learning difficulties and dyslexia?
4. Can you list below specific teaching and intervention strategies and resources that are used in the authority *to address* specific learning difficulties and dyslexia?
5. What measures are in place to facilitate referral of a child for specialist assistance and/or to receive learning support?
6. Is the information in the nursery profile considered sufficient to identify children at risk of specific learning difficulties and dyslexia in primary 1?
7. What other information does the authority pass on to primary school?
8. What are the arrangements for transition from the following to primary 1:
 - (i) Home?
 - (ii) Private Nursery?
 - (iii) Education Authority Nursery?

9. Are there any specific arrangements for children with indicators of, or considered 'at risk' of, specific learning difficulties and dyslexia in the transition arrangements?
10. If so, can you please specify?
11. Have you encountered any barriers preventing full implementation of the authority's early years policy in relation to specific learning difficulties and dyslexia?
12. If so can you provide details of the kinds of barriers that have been noted and how these have been addressed?
13. Describe below any examples of 'innovation' or 'good practice' that have taken place, or are currently underway in the authority in relation to specific learning difficulties and dyslexia.
14. Please submit supplementary material/information on this that might indicate:
 - (i) the research basis for the innovation,
 - (ii) how it has been implemented,
 - (iii) how widespread it has been implemented in the authority
 - (iv) details of any evaluations that have been carried out on the implementation of the innovation/good practices in the authority

C. Training

1. Describe the different types of training programmes that are available to early years' staff in relation to specific learning difficulties and dyslexia in the authority.
2. Can you give details of the uptake of these training programmes—for example, numbers of teaching staff who have attended such programmes in the last two years?
3. How satisfied is the authority with the current training programmes and arrangements for training in relation to specific learning difficulties and dyslexia in the early years?

D. Additional Comments

Please insert here any additional comments you wish to make that may be relevant to the research report.

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