

## Specific Learning Difficulties- Definitions and Comments

The Sheffield Dyslexia Centre (SDC) diagnostic process is concerned with the identification of specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and recommendations for subsequent support.

A SpLD can be described as an anomaly in an individual's profile which has a detrimental effect on aspects of academic progress. They occur across the range of intellectual abilities. There may be difference in how the person learns new skills and their difficulties may vary in presentation depending on environmental demands, life experiences and the support provided.

The most well-recognised SpLD is dyslexia:

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty which primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

- Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
- Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.

'Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties'  
Sir Jim Rose CBE June 2009

Another commonly occurring SpLD is Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) also known as dyspraxia

This is a disorder affecting movement and co-ordination in children, young people and adults. It is lifelong and distinct from other motor disorders such as Cerebral Palsy and stroke.

The person's co-ordination difficulties will affect functioning in everyday activities including in the classroom, at work and in leisure activities.

Dyspraxia can be diagnosed by the SDC assessors in those over 16 years old, as they have received the appropriate training.

A widely-used term is dyscalculia.

SDC does not use this as a diagnostic label as no conclusive definition and structure for assessment is considered to have been determined.

However, SDC does offer comprehensive assessment of maths difficulties to investigate the many and varied possible underlying causes.

Although it may not always be possible to assign a name, if a SpLD exists it can be described in terms of the pattern of the profile identified and appropriate recommendations for support can be provided.

Please note that the Specialist Teachers and Chartered Psychologists associated with SDC are not in a position to diagnose other conditions such as visual stress, the autistic spectrum (ASD) or attention dysregulation hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and DCD (dyspraxia) in children, as these are regarded as medical issues.

However, our appropriately trained assessors can diagnose DCD in adults and "identify" ADHD for the purposes of DSA for students and as experienced practitioners, they can offer advice on the effects of all of these on educational progress and recommend sources of formal and informal support.