

Dyspraxia (DCD) in Further and Higher Education



Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD), also known as Dyspraxia in the UK, is a lifelong condition affecting fine and gross motor co-ordination. This is formally recognised by international organisations including the World Health Organisation and is different from other co-ordination disorders such as cerebral palsy.

The range of intellectual ability is in line with the general population.

An individual's co-ordination difficulties may affect participation and functioning of everyday life skills in education, work and employment.

In adulthood many of the difficulties from childhood will continue, as well as learning new skills at home, in education and work, such as driving a car.

Individuals may vary widely in how their difficulties present.

This may change over time depending on environmental demands (e.g. starting off at college and university or examination times; the type of course they are taking; the demands of that course; the type of assignments given) and life experiences.

In college or university difficulties may be with:

- **Learning a new skill** may take longer than others. The student may be reticent to ask for help because of past experiences. They may work at a much slower pace and may struggle in meeting deadlines.
- **Recording notes in lectures**- handwriting often remains difficult – to write at speed and be legible to the student or others.
- **Organising themselves and their work**–Prioritising work, attending lectures on time, filing notes, organising their room may be harder.
- **Time concepts**- the student may not be good at judging how much time it takes to do a task, or time passing.
- **Multi-tasking** – such as doing more things at once or listening to someone and trying to do something else. Short-term memory difficulties may mean that information seems to be forgotten or gets confused.
- **Meeting people on time**-some students compensate for the possibility of being late by getting to places very early.
- **Planning and writing assignments** – sorting out key information from all the notes and being able to proof and check work adequately.
- **Specific work that requires fine motor co-ordination** e.g. lab work, mechanics, cooking.
- **Less confidence mixing with other students** and being more socially isolated.

- **Lack of clarity of speech**- or they may be slower to respond to questions.
- **Lack of experience, confidence or skill working in groups** and recognising the group dynamics.
- **Being aware of others' surroundings** e.g. in living with others in a house or in student accommodation and recognising what chores need to be done.
- **Anxiety and depression**-this is more common than in the general student population and may have been present from a young age. This may be worsened at times of stress such as moving to further or higher education, or at examination times.
- **Variability in performance**- students often describe having 'good and bad days' and that they can also feel very tired at times.
- **Increased sensitivity** to some sounds, smells, touch etc.

In addition

- They may avoid team sports and dancing as they are harder to do, and prefer to choose sports where they can be in control of their own movements such as swimming, using the gym, archery, martial arts.

There may be a range of co-occurring or overlapping difficulties which can also have serious negative impacts on daily life. These include social and emotional difficulties as well as problems with time management and planning and organisation, and these may impact an adult's education or employment experiences.

Many people with Dyspraxia also have other difficulties to a lesser or greater degree such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome. They may have difficulties with reading, spelling, organising, time management and socialising but may not have been given a formal diagnosis. It is important when supporting a student in further and higher education to be aware of these other potential challenges in order to support them fully.

Strategies that can be adopted by the college/university, in particular by the Student Disability Department

- 1) General guidance regarding general student life is helpful before starting on the course and specific guidance regarding the course specification and the pattern of challenges the student is reporting. Setting this up as early as possible in the process helps to increase chances of success e.g. arranging for course and lecture handouts to be available for the lectures.
- 2) If the student needs to apply for these concessions at university, they should seek an assessment in order to get a **Disability Students Allowance (DSA)**, which is available to full-time and part-time students. Students in further education can apply for an access grant.
- 3) Formal tuition in the planning and organisation of work, both practical and academic. Give examples of essays, reports and projects. Break down processes to steps with an opportunity for feedback to check understanding.

- 4) Discuss and organise extra time for course work and exams.
- 5) Strategies to compensate for poor memory and organisational skills. Ask what the student currently uses to help them to be more organised. Show different ways of increasing organisational skills such as using reminders on their phone, linking the phone with a calendar on their computer. Discuss different methods of note-taking and ask the student to try them out and see which works for them. Discuss methods of sorting and cataloguing information and notes. This may need to be reinforced and practised for some time to automate these skills.
- 6) If the student is anxious or seems depressed then referral to their GP or the student counsellor about approaches such as cognitive behavioural therapy, relaxation approaches and, where appropriate, medication may be helpful.
- 7) Computer hardware is very important e.g. laptops for note-taking and ergonomic keyboards and mice and large computer screens can make a great difference.
- 8) There is a variety of software that may help students:
 - Speech-to-text software e.g. Dragon Dictate (free app version), also free version on Microsoft Word.
 - Text-to-speech software e.g. Claroread, Text Help.
 - Organisation software – Sorted- the Daily organiser; synchronising your phone with your computer e.g. using Goglegmail.
 - Grammar correction software e.g. spellcheckers or Ghotit (www.ghotit.com)
- 9) A digital mini-disk recorder can help record lectures and seminars.
- 10) An extra allowance for photocopying may be necessary.
- 11) A Kindle, or iPad may be easier than ordering books from the library and not remembering to take them back.
- 12) Extra time should be given for the loan of library books, for students to process the information.

Funding

According to the Equality Act 2010

“If you have a disability, or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, you may be entitled to claim extra financial help as a student in further or higher education, or as an adult learner. This is paid on top of any standard student finance you may receive.”

Sources of extra financial help for disabled students include:

- Disabled Students' Allowances
- Access to Learning Fund
- Disability Living Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Learner Support Fund

- Adult Learning Grants

Financial help for adult learners

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/educationandlearning/adultlearning/financialhelp/oradultlearners/index.htm>

Further information available from:

Dyspraxia Foundation, 8 West Alley, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1EG

Tel: 01462 455016 (Admin) Website: <http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>

Useful Links:

Dyspraxia Foundation National Adult Support Group on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dyspraxia-Foundation-National-Adult-Support-Group/292164890796177>

BRAINHE <http://www.brainhe.com>

Dyscovery Centre <http://www.dyscovery.org>

(this contains a link to the download for a screening tool for FE and HE called the ADC)

Skill at Disability Rights UK

<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/disabledstudents.htm>

Disabled Students Helpline 0800 328 5050 (free)

<http://www.boxofideas.org>

<http://www.spldtransitions.co.uk>

Equality & Human Rights Commission <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>

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