

Guide to supporting students with dyslexia published

September 20 2013

The IOP has produced a practical guide to supporting STEM students with dyslexia – thought to be about 5% of all STEM students in higher education. It aims to show how dyslexia affects students in STEM and describes some simple measures for making teaching and learning more accessible.

The Institute's diversity programme leader, Jenni Dyer, said: "We've tried to make it as practical as possible. There's a lot of material out there on dyslexia and good practice already, but nothing specific to STEM students. Hence it was important that the guide was very STEM-focused so that people could read it and think 'maybe I'll try that'. It includes a lot of really good material that will enable all STEM academic staff to make simple adjustments to ensure that all their students, not just those with dyslexia, learn better."

The guide is aimed primarily at academic staff, both at the level of their individual teaching and at the departmental level. When departments set exams and marking criteria, for example, the guide encourages them to focus on the core competences of the course rather than penalising students for irrelevant mistakes, such as mis-spelling a scientist's name. The IOP hopes that the guide will also be useful to students who want to ask about the provision available in their universities.

More than half of people with dyslexia also have "visual stress", in which the text they are reading appears to move or dance around the page. A simple adjustment, such as using an inexpensive coloured overlay sheet,

can make a substantial difference to this, Dyer said. The guide also mentions that dyslexic students might have to "re-read information to take in the meaning". This is arguably common to most students, but Dyer explained that for a dyslexic student, just processing the letters making up the words can take a lot longer than is usual.

One student quoted in the guide comments: "It would be very nice to have a five-credit module on scientific writing at the beginning of the second year. Students don't want to learn halfway through the third year how to write properly." Another says: "Yes I got my first, but I had to work three times harder than anyone else."

Dyer said: "Moving into HE, the volume of study can have a massive impact on [students](#) with dyslexia because suddenly they're overwhelmed with reading and it can take them perhaps a term to read one book. Students can fear being discriminated against if they disclose their [dyslexia](#) but the quicker that they tell their universities, the more support can be put in place before they arrive. Dyslexia is now a well-recognised condition, likely to be present at birth, and it doesn't go away, though you can get better at dealing with it as you get older."

More information: www.iop.org/publications

Provided by Institute of Physics

Citation: Guide to supporting students with dyslexia published (2013, September 20) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-09-students-dyslexia-published.html>

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